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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXVIII MAY 19, 1928 No. 2

Coward of the Clan

By *Peter Henry Morland*

Author of "Trail of the Stone-that-Shines," etc.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

THE first thing that Paul Torridon remembered was being led by the hand to a tall man with long hair and a short gray beard, a beard that was chopped off brutally, for convenience rather than for appearance. Seen from the back with his curls flowing down over his shoulders, John Brett looked the portrait of some chivalrous cavalier. Seen from the front with that blunt stub of a beard, he seemed partly grotesque, partly savage. To heighten the contrast, his beard had turned while his hair still remained a glossy, youthful black.

Of what had gone before, Paul Torridon had no idea, but something about the face of this giant pierced his mind and remained in his thoughts forever.

"Is this one of them? Is this one of them?" shouted John Brett. "Why did you bring this thing home to me?"

"Shall I take him back and turn him loose in the woods?" asked the man who held the hand of Paul. "That'll answer the same purpose."

"You fool!" cried Brett. "You blathering, hopeless fool. You've brought him inside my house, haven't you?

Turn him over to the women and never let me see his face."

How the women received him, Paul Torridon forgot, except for one flash of recollection which had to do with an old crone who shook her finger at his head and groaned: "He'll bring harm to us all!"

Then the mists closed again around the mind of Paul Torridon.

He should have remembered much more, for he was well over seven years of age and, of course, far advanced into the period of full memory, but something had shocked the past into total oblivion, or else there was a sense of mere shadows moving among shadows, in the beginning.

His recollection of the past was cut like a thread, and at the same time his knowledge of the present washed away in waves, to-day carrying off in its withdrawal yesterday, and all the days before; so that for some time to come his only surviving sense of that period was that he had been surrounded by cloth, a world of homespun in drab colors, the enormous skirts of the women, and the bulky coats of the men.

He could see, later, that this was the time during which he was left exclusively to the hands of the women, and so he came by degrees out into the open light of full memory, full understanding.

He used to help the women at the milking of the cows. Once as he was bringing in a three-gallon pail half filled, the giant, John Brett, loomed suddenly before him.

"What's your name?" asked John Brett.

"Paul Torridon."

The face of John Brett grew black.

"As quick as the bell answers the bell hammer," said he.

He turned away, but poor little Torridon was so frightened that the milk pail fell to the ground and spilled a white tide across the mud. He knew that he would be beaten, but a whip could not fill his mind with terror as did the mere echo of the voice of John Brett.

He came upon one great and important truth—that there was something wrong with the name Torridon; and there was something right in the name Brett. Every one around the place was a Brett. The house of John Brett, in fact, was hardly a house so much as it was a village gathered hodgepodge under one roof. There was a blacksmith, a carpenter, a shoemaker, for instance. There was a storekeeper, even. And all these people, and those who plowed in the fields and rode off hunting through the mountains, bore the name of Brett. To the dawning intelligence of Paul Torridon it appeared that the world was filled with the name of Brett; for on holidays and Sundays, sometimes, strangers rode up. They were all big men on big horses, like those who lived under the roof of John Brett. And these visitors, too, carried the name of Brett.

Paul began to feel that his name was a freak, just as he himself was a freak compared to the sons of the house—he was so slenderly made, so delicate, and they were so big and brawny. Once Charles Brett, who was a little younger than Paul, took both the boy's hands in one of his and crushed them with his grip. Paul wrenched and pulled. At last he cried out with the pain and began to weep. Charles Brett looked at him, agape, and dropped the tortured hand.

"You're just like a girl, ain't you?" remarked Charlie

There were other Torridons. But they were far away. All by that name on the western side of the mountains had been wiped out in that night of blood and fire which had blotted the mind of Paul. The only Torridons who remained in all the world lived on the eastern side of the mountains. There let them remain, unless the Bretts

should decide to strike even at that distance and, riding through the passes, storm down on the enemy and smash them.

Charlie Brett used to talk about that. And he would end: "Then there'll be no Torridon left but you!" With that he would laugh triumphantly, mockingly.

Later Paul learned that in the distant past the Bretts and the Torridons had been so matched in strength that each side occasionally won a battle.

John Brett kept Paul for two years without further important remark. Then he met little Paul in a hall of the house and seemed startled at seeing him.

"Are you still around? Are you still around?" he exclaimed gloomily. "You're growin' up, too."

He took Torridon by the shoulder and pushed him toward the light. There he examined his face thoughtfully.

"You're growin' up," he repeated. "In a couple of years there'll be enough poison in you to kill a man—and a Brett!"

"I never would kill a man," said Paul.

"You're a Torridon, ain't you?" asked John Brett.

Paul began to cry.

"Why are you whimpering?" asked John Brett curiously. "Have I hurt you?"

"I don't know," said Paul. "I can't help crying. You—you make me tremble inside!"

John Brett went away.

Afterward Torridon was told that he was to be taken over the mountains to his kin, but two days after this he was ill with scarlet fever.

The summer went before he was strong enough to walk. In the spring of his tenth year a cow broke his leg with a kick. And another summer passed during which he was incapable of traveling. Bad luck dogged him. When he was twelve, pneumonia reduced him to a mere trembling wisp of a body. At thirteen he had not recovered. He was so weak that even Aunt Ellen Brett, that cruel and keen old woman who managed the household, forbade him to be given outdoor work. He was employed in the kitchen to scrub pans and light fires and carry in wood from the shed; in the long evenings he was set to work helping the women spin.

Now in the fourteenth year of his life two great events happened. One affected the entire clan. One had to do with Paul Torridon alone.

The first thing was the foaling of the black colt, and the reason it was of such importance was that John Brett had been hoping for twenty years to produce a colt of that color. For in the old days he had owned a great black stallion, Nineveh, still famous through all the country—a sort of legendary flyer. People said of a horse that it was "as fast as Nineveh," "as strong as Nineveh," just as they might say that a man was as strong as Hercules. All the horses which the Bretts rode were descended directly from that famous stallion, but there was never his like again and, strange to say, in all his get there appeared the pure black strain only twice, and these were mares and of little note.

Now, however, after twenty years of waiting, a black colt was foaled. The whole clan swept from the house—man, woman, child—and stood in the pasture in a large open circle.

The mother was an undistinguished creature, with a backbone thrusting up like a mountain ridge and a vast prominence of hips. Ewe-necked, lumpheaded, she was like an ugly spot in the fine race which had descended from Nineveh. But her foal was another matter.

He was black as coal. There was not a hair of white on any of his stockings. There was not a hair of white about his muzzle, or on his forehead, nor in his tail. He was one entire jet carving.

He looked to Paul Torridon like any other foal, except that he appeared a good bit on the clumsy, heavy side; but John Brett's face was working with delight. There was nothing about the colt that did not please him. He pointed out the slope of the shoulders, the depth at the heart, the huge bone.

"I gotta have a name for him," said John Brett.

"Nineveh Second," suggested Charles.

"He ain't a second Nineveh. He's gunna be better than that!" cried John Brett in great excitement.

No one dared to question the head of the clan, but at this speech heads were turned and covert smiles exchanged.

"What's a name like Nineveh?" cried John Brett. "Nineveh was a town, wasn't it?"

"It was a town in the Bible," answered another.

"Who knows something about it?" asked John Brett.

He swept the circle with a stern glance. "Where's the book-learning in this family? Where's the women that had ought to know about Bibles and books and things? Do the men have to stay home and waste their time."

The women looked gloomily upon one another. They might have pointed out that if the men were busy with hunting and farming, the women were still busier with mending, sewing, spinning, weaving, milking, cooking, housecleaning; but no one not even Aunt Ellen, dared to lift a voice when the master of the clan was in temper.

"Nobody!" cried John Brett, his gray beard quivering with wrath. "Nobody! Nobody knows nothing!"

A voice had been rising in Paul Torridon. It had been a great, bold voice when it started at his heart. It was the faintest of squeaking whispers when it came to his lips.

"I do," said he.

He was not heard, except by Aunt Ellen, who was near him.

She caught him by the shoulder and shook him violently.

"You do?" she asked. "D'you know something about it? Hey, John Brett, here's one that can talk about it!"

She thrust the boy out from the circle. For the first time in his life all eyes were upon him and not in scorn. Instead there was wonder, interest, hushed attention. Even John Brett was stirred.

"You know sump'n about Nineveh?" he asked, making his voice gentler than usual.

"Yes," said Paul, but the words made no sound upon his lips.

"Speak out, Paul," said the big man, still more quietly.

"I—I'll try," said Paul, his eyes almost straining from his head.

"Go on, then. Was Nineveh a town?"

"It was," said Paul.

"What kind of a town?"

"A great city," said Paul.

"Like Louisville?"

"It was much larger."

"Hey? Like Philadelphia, then?"

"It was larger," said Paul.

"Like New York?"

"Yes," said Paul.

John Brett was filled with admiration.

"Now, that's a dog-gone queer thing," he remarked. "There's a town as big as New York that's disappeared so complete that if it didn't have its name tucked away into the Bible, we'd never 've had a horse named after it. Now, Paul, I want a name that's got something to do with this here city. Gimme one, can you?"

The mind of Paul Torridon went round and round.

"Say something, you little putty-faced fool!" said Aunt Ellen in a savage whisper.

John Brett raised his brows and turned his frown upon her. She shrank back in silence.

"It was in Assyria," said Paul.

"Ah-ha!" cried John Brett. "That's pretty good. It was in Assyria. How

would Assyria do for a name for that colt?"

"It ain't got sound enough to it," suggested some one.

"No. It ain't got enough sound to it," agreed John Brett. "Now that Assyria, it would have a king, wouldn't it, Paul?"

"Yes, sir," answered Paul, who was recovering some of his self-control.

The entire circle was waiting breathless upon him and his answers.

"It *would* have a king, he says," proceeded John Brett in the same half-anxious, half-soothing tone. "Now, look how we're getting along! Now, Paul, that there colt is gunna be a king. He's gunna be a big, black king among hosses. Look at him. Don't be afraid. He's just makin' up to you, Paul!"

The black foal approached the boy with sharply pricked ear and began to nibble at his sleeve.

Paul dared not stir.

"Now, Paul," went on John Brett, "might you be able to tell me something like the name of a king of Assyria?"

"Yes," said Paul. "They had some very long names."

"You even know their names?" said Brett curiously.

And a stir of wonder ran rapidly around the circle.

"Some of them," said Paul. "There was Sennacherib, for instance, and——"

"Sennacherib! That's a longish name, and hard to get a tongue around. Now, Paul, could you think of some of the other names?"

"Yes," said the boy, "there was Merodach-baladan, and Shalmaneser, and Tiglath Pileser and——"

"Hold on, will you?" gasped John Brett. "Them names—I never heard nothing like them! But who was the biggest and the greatest king that they had, if you know, Paul?"

"Ashur-bani-pal was the greatest king," said Paul.

"Ashur-bani-pal," repeated John Brett slowly. "We don't seem to get along very well, do we?"

The mare, anxious about her foal, came up behind the boy and sniffed at his neck; her breath sent a shudder through all his body.

"Steady!" said John Brett. "Steady, my boy! She ain't gunna hurt you a mite. Only—I don't see how names could be that long, even in a Bible country like Assyria."

"The names really have several words in them," said Paul, wanting to run from the mare but not daring to move.

"Like what?"

"Ashur-bani-pal means 'Ashur creates a son."

"And who was Ashur?"

"Ashur was the chief god. He was the war god."

"And here's the chief hoss, and a war hoss," said John Brett, "and there's the name for him. Ashur it is! And you, Paul, how'd you come to know all this rigmarole about Assyria, and what not?"

CHAPTER II.

COLD WATER.

THE answers which young Torridon had made to the questions of John Brett had been attended by the rest of the clan with a most hushed interest, but to no answer did they give stricter heed than to the present one, when Paul said simply: "I've been sick a great deal, you know. And I had nothing to do but lie in bed and read."

"Well," said John Brett, "then I think I'll put some of the other children to bed for a while!"

This brought a laugh, and in the laughter Paul was able to slip away. But he was vastly pleased. Never before had he been looked on with respect by the others. Certainly he never had been such a center of attention.

This was not the end of the incident; it was the beginning of a new phase in

the life of Paul. From that moment he was some one in the community of the Bretts. Even old Aunt Ellen, regarding him with her overbright eyes, said afterward: "He's got a brain behind those eyes of his!"

He repeated that saying over and over again to himself for days and days afterward. He had a brain. The others had their great, strong bodies, their great, strong hands; he had a brain! The first spark of pride fell on his soul, and the fire was beginning to burn.

It burned exceedingly small, however, at first. There was need of much tinder of the most delicate sort to feed the flame, and only gradually he came to realize that his position in the household was altered. He had to do the same things as before. But there was a touch of respect on all hands. The Bretts valued in man little other than force of hand and courage of heart, but Paul Torridon they began to accept as an oddity with a sort of strength as great as his weakness.

In the early autumn John Brett summoned the boy one evening and told him to bring in all the books which he had read.

They made several loads. He heaped them on the table. Books were an accident in the Brett household, but there was an arithmetic, and an algebra of vast antiquity, a good old-fashioned grammar, a history of the ancient world, a thick tome from which the cover was entirely missing and the title page gone as well. This, together with a Bible and a "Pilgrim's Progress," constituted the backbone of the reading of young Paul. The rest consisted of a miscellaneous assortment, from almanacs to novels. Not one of those books had been bought intentionally by the Bretts, but all had been taken in gathering in the effects of a bankrupt neighbor who could pay his debts in no way except through his goods. They had lain in an attic unnoticed for years, while the rats ate through many of them. There Paul Torridon had found them, and through the long months and months of his illnesses, he had worked over them with the patience of despair. Even the problems in the arithmetic and the algebra were a delight, and when the last of them was solved he had fallen into a profound gloom.

Now he stood by the table and saw John Brett, with thick and unaccustomed fingers, turning the frail leaves of the books. Delicately and carefully he handled them, as though in fear lest they rend like spider's silk under his touch.

He remarked finally: "There's thirty-five books here!"

"Yes," said Paul.

"You've read them all?"

"Yes. Several times over."

The big man lifted his brows. He rested his chin on the hard palm of his hand and stared.

"Several times? You mean that?"

"This one a great many times," said the boy, and touched the ponderous ancient history.

"How come that?"

"After pneumonia, you remember it was weeks and weeks before I could leave my bed, and I had only this book in the room."

"And you read that?"

"Four times through, carefully."

"Didn't you get tired of it?"

"No, because I never was able to remember everything in it."

"Why didn't you send for some of the other books?"

"I did ask for them. Nobody wanted to go."

The glance of Brett sharpened again. Then he looked suddenly aside. That small remark evidently had meant something to him. He sent the boy off to bed, but a week later, when the first frost began, he conversed with Paul again.

"Your fifteen, Paul?"

"Yes, sir."

"You've been here eight years?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you willin' to work?"

"I'm willing to do what I can."

"Education is pretty good," observed John Brett. "I'm gunna make a school, with you for the teacher, and every man and boy up to twenty in the whole tribe is gunna come and study under you, and all the girls up to fifteen. Can you teach 'em?"

Paul Torridon was aghast, but he dared not refuse.

He lay awake that night, staring at the darkness. He tried to think of himself imposing tasks upon Charles Brett, for instance. The thought was unthinkable!

However, the plan went forward. Whatever John Brett determined upon, he put through with suddenness and with effect. The three clans of the Bretts lived at equal distances from one another. They were like the three points of a triangle. Almost in the center was a crossroads. There John Brett called a meeting of the heads of the families, and there he struck his heel into the ground and declared that the schoolhouse must be posted.

The others agreed. They dared not dispute with him, any more than soldiers would have dared to dispute with a general. They lived in a sea of dangers, and they knew the value of the leadership of this rough, rude man. The schoolhouse was built in two weeks. A stove was installed in the center of it. Paul Torridon was told to meet his first class.

Pale from a sleepless night, he walked out over the frosty, white road, stumbling in the ruts uncertainly. The boots which the Brett shoemaker turned out were only roughly shaped to the foot. And these which Torridon wore were castoffs of Charlie Brett. His feet slipped about in them awkwardly. And three shanks as large as his could have fitted into the tops. His coat, too, was a discard. Much scrubbing with soap had faded and worn the tough homespun but had not dimmed the splendor of the grease spots with which it was checkered. It was rubbed through at either elbow, and was so big that he wrapped it around him and pinned one edge of it above his right hip. His hat was a battered, green-faded thing which lay without shape on his head, the brim falling down over his eyes.

There was so little strength in Torridon that he was wearied without being warmed by the walk. Neither can the weak enjoy the beauty of a winter scene, and he looked about him in despair at the naked trees, their limbs outlined with broken pipings of white frost. He saw no living thing except, on a bare bough, a row of little birds, with their feathers all ruffed out and their heads drawn in until they seemed little, round, headless balls.

He yearned with all his heart to be back in the kitchen at the house of John Brett, or even amid the sour smells of the creamery. Everything that was familiar was cheering to him. Everything that was strange was a load upon his mind.

When he came in sight of the schoolhouse, he halted. His legs were powerless to carry him forward. It was not until the chill thrust through his very vitals that he spurred forward and with slow steps approached the door.

He opened it with a desperate thrust of his hand and stepped quickly inside. His greeting was the tumbling of a bucket of water which had been propped above the door by a practical jester. He was drenched to the skin and stood shivering in a wild outburst of laughter.

In that roar of mirth were the voices of twenty-year-old youths, brutalized by heavy labor and exposure all the days of their lives. There was the shouting of girls almost as brown and strong as

their brothers, and the shrill piping of children.

In the midst of that dreadful mockery, Paul Torridon shuddered and turned blue with the cold of the water. He went to the stove, wrung the water from his coat, and then spread his hands close to the heated iron.

He looked around him, his head jerking with nervousness. Seventeen grinning faces looked back at him, expectant, scornful, contemptuous. Only one looked neither at him nor at her companions, but down at her folded hands. That was Nancy Brett.

CHAPTER III.

DAVID AND GOLIATH.

HE could not make himself warm. He could only thaw the outer layers of the cold, as it were. Then he went to his desk. It was raised on a little platform at the end of the room. It consisted of a table with two drawers on either side. A subdued murmuring was sweeping from one side of the room to the other; the grinning faces watched him, brightly, as mischievous dogs watch a cat they are about to pounce on. Nancy Brett had raised her head and watched him, also, but gravely, with a veil over her eyes, so to speak.

He was more conscious of her quiet scorn than of all the unmasked grins of the rest.

"We'd better start," said Paul hoarsely, with writing down our names. You all have slates and slate pencils. Please write down your names!"

He sat down and waited. There was only one who stirred to obey, and that was Nancy Brett.

For five minutes he waited. Then he rose from his chair. His face was icy cold, and he knew that it must be deadly white. Directly opposite his desk was big Jack Brett, burly six-footer, twenty years old, dark as an Indian, and as savage. He sat with arms folded, waiting, sneering.

Paul started for him, met that sneer, and hesitated.

He looked wildly about him. In the farther corner he saw Charles Brett drop his head and turn crimson, and he knew that Charlie was blushing with hot shame to think that one who had lived under the same roof with him should be such a helpless coward. But most of all, Paul saw Nancy, whose eyes were averted toward the window and whose face was pale also.

And then a sudden thought came to him with a blessed relief. After all, he could not do more than die, and death itself would be the open door through which he would escape from this flamboyant mockery, this scorn, this contemptuous world in which all his days were so wretched.

He went straight up to big Jack.

"Can you write?" he asked.

"Young feller," said Jack, bending dark brows, "are you sassin' me, maybe?"

The room hushed to delicious expectancy.

"If you can write," said Paul, "why haven't you put down your name?"

The big fellow grinned. He searched inward for insulting phrases, but all he could find to say was: "Maybe I'm gunna write it and maybe I ain't. Maybe I ain't ready to write it. And you—what you gunna do about it? Do I get a licking?"

He leered at Paul out of the greatness of his strength. Death, certainly, was coming upon the teacher. So, at least, he felt. Those mighty hands could break him like a reed; those balled fists, like ragged lumps of iron, could smash straight through his body.

And across the mind of Paul came an echo from an old romance which he had read in one of his times of illness. In that book, ringed with enemies, the hero had bidden the most formidable of them

all to come from the house with him and settle their differences in solitude.

Now he quoted from it, word for word: "Will you leave the room with me, sir?"

That "sir" might have caused more comment, but the excitement was so tense that it was passed over.

"And why'n earth should I leave the room with you?" asked big Jack.

Almost in those words the brute of the novel had spoken, and the hero had answered as Paul answered now: "There are women here. Do you wish them to see blood?"

Big Jack lurched to his feet. He was half of a mind to knock down the little school-teacher then and there, but Paul already was moving uncertainly toward the door. He found it through a mist, and stepped out into the cold, clear morning.

Jack strode behind him. Like a giant he seemed as he stood with feet braced at the bottom of the steps.

"Now what do you want?" he asked savagely.

"I want you," said the young teacher, "to go home to your father and tell him that you have refused to do what I asked you to do. Or else go back into the school and begin to work."

There was a gasp from the massed faces at the door. The handsome face of Jack grew scarlet with anger.

"And if I don't do either, then what?"

"Then," said Paul, "I'll have to try to make you."

"Well," snarled Jack, "I ain't gunna do neither. And you try to make me, kid. I ask you that!"

"Very well," said Paul. He looked at those balled fists with a sigh. The stronger and harder they were, the better. Death would be utterly painless. "Very well," said Paul, and stepping a little closer, he flicked big Jack lightly across the face with his open hand.

The answer was all that Paul could have prayed for. It was totally painless. It seemed that a heavy blow fell on the base of his brain, and he dropped into a thousand leagues of darkness.

When he recovered, the sun was spinning across the face of the sky in vast circles. The schoolhouse fairly dissolved in the speed with which it whirled. The trees near by blurred together.

"He's alive!" cried a deep, heavy voice.

"Lift him up and carry him in from this frosty ground," said the voice of a girl.

Paul closed his eyes again, and the darkness shot over his brain once more in a long, slow wave, beginning at his feet.

He wakened near the heat of the stove. A cold cloth was across his forehead. He raised his hand to a bulging, painful lump on the side of his jaw. That was where the blow had fallen. How strange that it had not broken the bone, snapped his neck, smashed all before it!

He could not see clearly, but when that same heavy man's voice spoke again, he recognized the tones of big Jack.

"How's the back of your head, Paul? Will you feel it there—where it whacked the ground?"

Paul obediently fumbled at the spot. It was a little sore, but there seemed nothing wrong.

"It ain't fractured?" gasped Jack.

"No. I'm all right. I——"

"Lie still, will you? Lie still and—Nancy, what'd we better do with him? I'll get my wagon and haul him home."

Paul sat up.

A silent, pale circle stood about them. On their knees beside him were Nancy and Jack.

"I'm all right," said Paul.

He climbed to his feet. With his great hands, Jack followed the movement, ready to support him if he should fall again.

But he would not fall again! He was stronger at that moment than ever he had been in the world. For he had come through the valley of death, and here was the face of lovely Nancy, pale, but lighted with eyes which were on fire with admiration.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST LESSON.

THERE are various thresholds which we must cross, between that of life and that of death, and when young Paul Torridon had risen to his feet and stood safely on them, though his head still rang and his very soul was bruised by his great fall, yet he knew that he had crossed the greatest threshold of all and found himself.

He could look around upon that room without trembling. He went back to his desk, the huge Jack attending him. There, safely seated, he said in a rather faint voice: "Now we'll begin again—your names, please, on the slates."

Instantly the vast shoulders of Jack Brett bowed over the slate. He labored, and having finished, he turned slowly around and stared grimly about the schoolroom. There were a full half of the pupils who still had not entirely understood what change had occurred in the school, but the dreadful glare of Jack quickly convinced them that something had changed. They hastened to snatch at their pencils. There was no sight except that of bowed, earnest workers.

Then a little girl of eight began to cry.

"What's the matter?" asked the teacher.

"I dunno how to write," wailed the child. "My mummy never taught me!"

The head of Paul Torridon was quite clear now.

"Then I'll teach you," said he. "That's why I'm here."

He began to make a tour of the room and studied the sprawling and labored writings until he came to the slate of Nancy.

There he paused a moment.

"I think you had better be a teacher, too," said Torridon.

She looked quickly up to him, surprised, and then she flushed a little with pleasure.

"I will, if I can," said she.

He moved on and came to Jack Brett.

A certain rigidity about the back of the giant took his attention. The neck was as rigid as a pillar of red-hot steel. The head was poised to withstand shocks. And when he looked over the shoulder of the big fellow he saw upon the slate—a meaningless scrawl!

He looked down into the eyes of Jack. They stared straight ahead. One who is about to enter the fire without protest would look forward in that manner.

Torridon picked up that slate and carried it to his desk, where he turned about and faced the class. Dreadful misery was in the face of big Jack now, and by the peculiar prescience of the sensitive soul, Paul understood what his late enemy expected—that the shapeless scratchings on his slate would be exposed to all eyes.

Torridon laid the slate upon his desk, face down.

"Jack Brett!" he said.

Jack Brett rose slowly to his feet. One hand was gripped into a fist, not to strike, but to endure.

"There's a lot of the wood in the shed that needs splitting. You'd better go and do that to-day."

Vast silence seized upon the schoolroom. They waited as for a thunderbolt to strike. Then a faint sigh of amazement came from those who watched, for Jack Brett, his fine face crimson to the throat, turned and stalked from the room.

Still they waited, until from the rear of the school they heard the loud, crisp ring of an ax as it was driven home

into hard wood. At that sound every eye in the schoolroom became empty, blank with submission, like the eye of a penned calf. Torridon knew that the great battle was fought and won.

All morning he worked. By noon he understood rather clearly what each one in the room knew, and it was pathetically little. There was hardly a girl there who could not sew, spin, manage a creamery, cook. There was not a boy who could not bring one of the massive, soft-iron rifles to his shoulder and shoot a squirrel out of a treetop. But about books they knew little or nothing. Only Nancy knew.

To read, to write, to spell, to do arithmetic. Those were the tasks for which he must prepare them, and he went about it methodically, patiently, hopefully. Nancy helped at once. She took the little girls about her and started their small hands to work on the copies which she furnished them.

Noon came. Lunch was eaten. Then for a half hour the place echoed with shouts as the children played. And afterward, the long afternoon went by almost to dusk. For John Brett had set down the hours which the school should endure!

Many a weary, suffering face had Torridon to look at before the school was dismissed. He went to the door and thanked Nancy. If she would ask her father if he would permit her to help in the mornings, then in the afternoon he would teach her what he could.

"And how old are you, Nancy?"

"I'm fourteen."

He watched her go off after the others. He could tell her from the rest as long as she was in sight. Her clothes were as rough as those of the others, but she wore them differently. And her step was different. She was a harmony of pleasant music to Torridon.

Then the great shadow of Jack Brett stood before him.

"Well?" said Jack.

Torridon smiled frankly at him, though it was a twisted smile, for one side of his face was very swollen and sore.

"I thought it would be better if you stayed after school and worked with me," said he simply.

They sat by the stove. So long as the day lasted, Jack Brett worked. It seemed impossible that he should cramp down his big fingers enough to hold the pencil. He leaned his head low and grimly set his teeth. Gross were his untrained muscles, but in his mind there was the same steady patience which had made him, at twenty, the finest shot in all that close-shooting clan.

Afterward, they locked the door of the school. Dusk was falling. The blueness stood close at hand, with the frosty trees only dimly etched. The freezing ground crackled under their feet. For a moment they looked around at this. Then:

"Well, good night, Paul."

"Good night, Jack."

They separated and went home, but something more than words had passed between them. The thin legs of Torridon bore him lightly up all the way to the house and he found himself singing, though with a faint voice.

He soaked his swollen face with a cold compress, but it seemed as swollen as ever when he went in to supper and sat down at the great table. Curious glances fell on him. Little Ned, opposite him, stared frankly, as though at a stranger never before seen, and suddenly the great voice of John Brett boomed:

"Paul!"

He started to his feet. In that house every one rose when addressed by the master.

"Yes, sir," said Paul.

"What's happened to your face, eh?"

He had half expected that question. He had turned the answer in his mind half a dozen times. It was the expecta-

tion of that answer which had made Jack Brett so pale and grave when he said good-by that evening, for when the wrath of terrible John Brett descended upon the boy, it would be a thing to remember, to tell of in the clan for three generations.

He said slowly: "I had a fall to-day."

All heads lifted. All heads turned toward him. There was a peculiar wonder in every eye.

"You had a fall?" echoed John Brett in a voice of thunder. "Where?"

"On the ground," said Torridon.

"Come here to me!"

He went obediently, fear cold and heavy in his heart.

"You fell on the ground, did you?"

"Yes."

"What made you fall?"

Torridon was silent.

The voice of John Brett rose to a terrible thunder that shook the room.

"What made you fall?"

And still Torridon, cold and sick, was silent, and kept his eyes desperately fixed upon the eyes of the questioner. So he stood for hours of dread, as it seemed.

"Go back to your place!" said John Brett suddenly.

And Torridon went slowly back and sat down, stunned.

Opposite him he saw the malicious grin of Ned. Sly glances passed between the other boys. But only Aunt Ellen dared to speak, after a while, saying: "Standing up and defyin' the head of the house—that's what it's come to, eh? There's the Torridon in him speakin'!"

"Be quiet!" commanded John Brett.

Aunt Ellen raised her brows.

"I was teachin' him some manners," she muttered.

The tyrant growled: *"I'll* teach the young men of this house their manners. You—what've you been tryin' to do with Paul? Dress him up like a scarecrow? Ain't there enough clothes in this here house to dress him like—a man?"

It was a crushing blow for Aunt Ellen. Fiercely she scowled down at her plate, but her lord and master had spoken, and she dared make no reply. As for Torridon, he could not believe that he had heard correctly.

That meal ended. When the others filed out, he waited until the last, half expecting that the harsh voice of John Brett would summon him again, but no summons came. He was allowed to go free.

He went out to the barn. Every evening it was his habit to do that, and to slip into the big stall where Ashur was kept like a young prince. He had a feeling of possession in connection with that colt, for, having given it a name, and through it having come to some note in the house of the Bretts, he retained a sense of kindness toward it. So, in the worn darkness of the barn, he gave the colt a carrot and remained a moment while Ashur sniffed at him and nibbled at his pockets, in hope of something more. Like silk was the muzzle of Ashur, silken was the skin of his neck where the boy stroked it, and by degrees peace came slowly down upon Paul's soul, so troubled to-day, and so uplifted from the burden of the fear of man.

CHAPTER V.

PATIENT AND PERSEVERANT.

FOR several days he waited in expectation of punishment from John Brett, because he had stood before the king of the clan and refused to give an answer to his question, but the blow did not fall. And then, on the third day, Aunt Ellen clothed him in new, stout homespun. John Brett viewed him with evident pleasure.

"Now you look like something," was all he said.

And the boy went off to his school.

Books had been ordered, books were

arriving. Every evening young Torridon struggled eagerly ahead through the texts, making sure that he was perfect in them. For he himself must know before he could teach, and above all, there was the necessity of keeping well ahead of Nancy. She learned rapidly, smoothly. Her mind was like clear crystal, and imagined all things well. In the mornings she helped him with the little ones. In the afternoon, she was a careful student.

Discipline in that school was perfect. Jack Brett looked after it. There were two other hulking fellows almost as strong as Jack himself. He thrashed them both soundly before the first week was over, and after that the school went easily along. During that first strenuous week, Jack himself remained each evening to work at his writing. He carried home his slate. There he worked again, covertly, seriously, by lantern light, sitting up until the odd hours of the morning. But on the next Monday he could take his place regularly with the rest of the class.

He asked for no special treatment. Like a bulldog he fastened on his work, and gradually he improved. The example of well-disciplined industry which he exhibited worked well with the others. Small and big, they began to bend to their studies, and before Christmas came, big hands and small were writing and figuring to the great content of Torridon.

This occupation began to have its reaction upon him. He was no longer a wretched stray, to be scorned by the others. He had become a distinct person, and while no other youth among the clan of Brett would have looked forward to such a task as that of schoolmastering, nevertheless Paul Torridon, being unique, was at least respected.

Sometimes he thought that some of their pleasure in his teaching was that they had made a member of another clan, an enemy, their servant, their public servant. But in the meantime, this new-found pride of spirit had even a physical reaction upon him. He grew taller, stronger. His cheeks no longer sank in beneath the cheek bones; there was a trace of hearty color in them. And, at Christmas time, another interest came into his life.

Big Jack, through all the weeks, had been rendering what service he could. Never once had he referred to the first tragic day in the school, nor to the shelter which the schoolmaster had put between him and the wrath of John Brett, but Torridon could feel that the big fellow's gratitude would never be exhausted.

Several times, at the noon hour and after school, he had offered to teach Torridon how to shoot. But the thin arms and the weak shoulders of Paul could not sway up the massive weight of a rifle and hold it steady. On the last day before Christmas, therefore, Jack had brought to the school a small package, and when the rest had gone from the school, he unwrapped his parcel and took out an old double-barreled pistol, made light and strong by some good gunsmith. He laid it in the hands of Paul Torridon.

"You can shoot this, Paul," he said. "Why, even a girl could handle it. It's like a feather!"

A feather indeed, in his great grasp, but to Paul Torridon it was weight enough. Nevertheless, when he closed his hand upon it, he felt that he had passed through another door and advanced still further into manhood.

There were tears of pleasure in his eyes when he shook hands with Jack. He accepted the small packet of powder and shot. Then Jack gave a little object lesson. He took the big chopping block as a target. Even then, standing not many paces away, he missed it thrice, The fourth bullet lodged in an upper corner, and Jack sighed with relief.

"A rifle's the gun for me," he said.

"One of these here things, you gotta have nerves like steel to work with 'em. But you, Paul, you could do it. You—you can stand up and turn yourself into ice."

He flushed, making this oblique reference to the first day of school, when Paul had stood up only to be knocked down.

So Paul took his new treasure home.

He looked upon it as the most beautiful thing he ever had seen. The fact that big Jack had missed a target thrice with it showed that it was hard to master. But here was something within his strength, and once a master of the gun, then he would feel a man indeed!

It began a new period in his life. Excalibur to the young Arthur meant no more than this weapon to Paul Torridon.

The Indian border was not far away. The land was filled with rough men. The law of the land was not so strong as the law of guns, and this was a weapon which he could learn to use. He held it in an almost superstitious regard. Every night, his last act, performed with devotional care, was to clean it scrupulously, and through the day it never left him. Jack himself taught him how it could be carried out of sight in a sort of pouch under his left arm-pit, ready to be drawn. And it seemed that no one suspected that it was with him. Powder and lead were plentiful in the house of John Brett; what he took never was missed; and his practicing was done in the heart of the woods, where the small, hollow echo from the little weapon soon died away.

Yet the shooting of the gun was the smallest part of Paul's labor. He practiced for hours holding it on a mark. At first it twitched curiously in his nervous hand. But by degrees he learned to steady the nerves, until at last it was held in his fingers as in a rock.

In the three years that followed, he marked time by the progress which he made with the gun; and in the third year, when he walked toward the school over the frosted roads, woe betide the unlucky rabbit which tried to bolt across the way to shelter on the farther side. The pistol glinted into the hand of Torridon, and the rabbit leaped once, and leaped no more.

He had grown taller. Among the gigantic Bretts he was hardly more than a child, but actually he was well above the average. It was not in height that he differed from them so greatly, however, as in the manner of his making. There was hardly a woman or a girl among them with a hand so small, unless it were little Nancy's. There was hardly a pair of shoulders which would not have made two like his.

But he was not weak. He had not the power which enables a man to lug a heavy pack through the uncertain going of the woods for hours and hours, covering long miles. The lumbering giants of the Brett clan could do this. There was not a man of them who could not hold up his end. But Torridon, of a different blood, had other gifts.

If it came to a foot race—bare feet along the hard, beaten path—he flashed home by himself. Not even big Jack—now passed beyond John Brett's arbitrary school age—could keep up with the slender youngster. And that quality gave him additional standing, for fleetness of foot is prized in a community where speed of foot may mean the difference between life and death before the possessor is very old.

The massive rifle still was clumsy in his hands; he had an awe of it, but no fondness for its use, and therefore he was shut out from distinction in the most important of all backwoods pursuits. But he could ride a horse. He had no might to crush the ribs of a horse, as the Bretts were apt to do. He had no jaw-breaking power in his hands and arms to check his mount, either.

But he learned that touch will do what power will not, and balance will keep the saddle when strong knees are flung to the ground.

So he grew up, light, wiry, nervously exact in his proportions. Beauty, after all, we are apt to judge by utility. In the backwoods, men wanted hands in which a massive ax would quiver like a reed, in which the ponderous iron rifle was a mere toy; to them such hands are beautiful. They wanted shoulders, too, which thought nothing of a hundred-pound pack and a day's march, in time of need. So such shoulders were a point of beauty, too. They wanted a body of sufficient bulk to match those vital hands and shoulders. So their ideal grew up as naturally as a tree from the ground. But if an artist had been there to scan them, and then turn his eyes to Paul Torridon, he would have had strange things to say, things of which Paul himself was most ignorant. He despised that slender, supple body of his, those quick, light hands. He despised all things about himself except, alone, his knowledge of books, which had made the clan prize him, and his ability with the pistol which, in some distant day, might come to mean much to him.

As for his attitude toward the clan, he accepted them because he knew nothing else.

Said Jack to him on a day—Jack, newly back from a long hunting trip, brown, hard, powerful as Hercules. "Tell me, Paul, don't you ever hanker to get over the mountains to your own people?"

Paul had often thought of it, of course. But his answer to himself always had been what it was to Jack Brett on this day: "Suppose that I started. They'd hunt me down with dogs, Jack."

"Who?" asked Jack, frowning.

"John Brett—your own father—perhaps you yourself, Jack!"

"I?" cried Jack. "Never, Paul!"

The school-teacher laid a hand on the arm of his great friend.

"You don't know yourself. Suppose that I'm out of sight. I'm no longer Paul. I'm just a Torridon. Well—what did they do to my people before me?"

Jack sighed and shook his massive head.

"I don't know, Paul," said he. "How do you know? It was a fair fight, I think."

"That's what the Bretts say."

"John Brett wouldn't lie."

"I'm afraid to ask him. Suppose he has to tell me an ugly story? Then what would happen after that? He'd know that I hated him. He'd be suspicious. The first time I moved—that would be an end of me."

"But how can you stand it?" cried Jack. "Ain't you gunna try to find out?"

"Some day," nodded Paul.

"Well," said Jack, "you're—patient!"

And Torridon knew that an uglier word had been in the mind of his big friend.

CHAPTER VI.

A QUEEN DETHRONED.

YET it seemed to Paul the wise thing to wait and let time bring its own decision. Vaguely, little by little, he could feel manhood coming upon him. He could feel a strength—not the strength of a Brett—garbing him.

And at last that strength was revealed to all the clan and to him, as well.

Ashur, the beginning of his rise in the world, was the turning point again.

For John Brett, anxious that his chosen horse should grow great and strong, had refused to allow so much as a strap to be put on it until it came to its third year. And now, three years and more in age, he at last summoned the best rider he could find and bade him try out the colt.

Of course that was Roger Lincoln.

The great man came riding upon a lofty horse with rich wampum braided into its mane and tail. His own hair was free to flow down over his shoulders. He did not have a hat on his head. A crimson band around his forehead held the hair from fluttering into his eyes. Over his shoulder was a painted buffalo robe of price. He wore a splendid suit of antelope leather, beaded over almost its entire surface. His moccasins were miracles of Indian art.

Even when Paul Torridon saw him in the distance, with half a dozen fences in between to obscure him, he recognized Roger Lincoln by the many descriptions which he had heard of that glorious hero. For Roger Lincoln was a king of the prairies, far West, and a true lord of the mind. Indian or white man, all were captivated by his mien, his grace, his dauntless heroism.

In was very lucky that John Brett could find him. Nine-tenths of his days were spent on the distant plains, but now he was back on one of his rare visits.

All the Bretts were on hand to see the breaking of Ashur.

That great event was to take place at ten in the morning. Hours before, the clan began to assemble at the house of John Brett and then poured out into the pasture. So the whole crowd turned when the coming of Roger Lincoln was announced.

He did not turn up the road. He came straight toward the pasture, jumping his horse over the fences on the way. It was a wonderful gray mare. Every one knew the story of how Roger Lincoln journeyed far south to the land of the Comanches and captured that mare, the pride of its horse-loving nation. It was not over tall, but it carried the weight of big Roger Lincoln like the merest feather, and winged its way over the fences, Roger Lincoln sitting handsomely at ease, his head high, his buffalo robe flaunting out behind him.

He seemed to be regarding distant things upon the horizon, paying no attention to the obstacles in his path.

So he came up to the pasture and leaped to the ground. With one hand he held the robe, flung gracefully about him. The other hand, his famous right hand, he offered to John Brett and to all the rest of the clan in turn, without making the slightest exception. He even paid that attention to tiny Miriam, two years old, as she backed against the knees of her mother and stared in fear at the tall stranger.

Paul Torridon followed that progress with interest. Every one seemed altered as by a touch of witchcraft at the coming of Roger Lincoln. The women seemed rudely made, ugly, clumsy, as he stood before them. The men, one after another, turned to heavy louts. Even Jack Brett, so tall, so handsome, so mighty of shoulder, seemed a staring, stupid boy in contrast with this bright Achilles of the plains.

There were only two exceptions, for even the coming of Roger Lincoln could not dim the fierce presence of John Brett, the patriarch and lawgiver. And when the hero came to Nancy Brett, although she was a small girl in her seventeenth year, she seemed to grow taller, older, more beautiful. Torridon himself, as he afterward knew, was seeing her for the first time, that instant. He had always felt, before, that she was a little too proud, too calm, too self-contained. If she were kind and gentle, often, it was merely because she had set herself a high standard and for the sake of her own self-respect she would not fall beneath that level. She was judicious, grave; there was nothing emotional about her, nothing free, easy, carefree.

But on this lovely day, when she took the hand of Roger Lincoln and smiled up into his handsome face, Torridon saw

that there was an inner soul in Nancy such as he never had guessed at.

He was full of the wonder of this when Roger Lincoln approached him.

Of all the people gathered, Torridon was the only one that Roger Lincoln did not notice, and this was not because of any lack of courtesy on his part, but because Torridon was utterly overshadowed by the stallion.

He had been given the task of holding Ashur, and for a very good reason. The horse was not used to others. He had been treated with such scrupulous and almost frightened reverence by the rest of the clan, since the moment of his foaling, that no one dared to take liberties with him, fondle his arched neck, rub his forehead between his gleaming eyes. But Torridon had begun in the beginning. He had made his way with sugar and apples and carrots. It was he who groomed the proud young beauty every morning before he went to the school. It was he who whistled Ashur in from the pasture in the evening.

This morning, therefore, what more natural than that he should put the saddle on Ashur, and slip the bit between his teeth. He had taken Ashur by the forelock and pulled down his lofty head, so that the ear-stalls could be slipped into place.

Now, as the crowd gathered, it was Torridon who stood at the head of the stallion. He kept some wisps of grass with which to wipe away the froth that came as Ashur, growing excited in the presence of such numbers, champed at the bit and frothed.

And, while the observers circled and stared and wondered and admired this descendant of coal-black Nineveh, sometimes Ashur, wearied of them all, would close his eyes and flatten his ears, and thrust his nuzzle strongly against the breast of his keeper. At other times, however, he amused himself biting the back of Torridon's hands. Sometimes he would catch the boy by the wrist and press harder and harder, mischievously dealing out pain until Torridon cried out in pretended agony. Then Ashur would throw up his glorious head, with upper lip stiffly distended, eyes wild, as though he expected a blow in repayment.

They were full of understanding of one another. For three years, they had known one another every day.

So it was only natural that Roger Lincoln, having made his circle of the crowd, when he came to the bright presence of the young stallion should not notice the youngster who stood at the head of the horse.

Roger Lincoln stood for a long time gazing. Silence came upon all the crowd. They were still with expectancy and fear, because Roger Lincoln, of course, knew horseflesh as no other man in the world could know it.

Only John Brett kept an unchanged face, but Torridon, who knew how to watch little things, made note that the pipe tilted up in the grip of the patriarch's teeth and from its bowl thick clouds of smoke were driven forth by his heavy breathing.

"Come here, Comanche," said Roger Lincoln.

The gray mare came to him like a dog, and all the women cried out softly, in admiration of such a tender intimacy between a man and his horse.

Then all fell silent again, biting their lips and looking from Lincoln to John Brett. Because, of course, it was patent that Roger Lincoln had some disagreeable things to say, but that he would not say them until he could illustrate the difference between the colt and a perfect pattern, such as the gray mare.

With a word the plainsman made his mare stand like a rock. Then he began to circle the two. He stood behind them. He stood before them.

There was almost a tragedy when he reached for the hocks of Ashur. That

young and haughty prince tried to bite and strike and kick at the same instant.

Torridon, blackness whirling before his eyes, looked to see Roger Lincoln fall torn and crushed to the ground, but the big man had slipped away, as a dead leaf slips from before a striking hand.

"I'll go with you," said Torridon eagerly. "Then he'll be all right."

"You will?" said Roger Lincoln, and he turned to Torridon and saw him for the first time.

Such eyes never had fallen upon Torridon before. They were between hazel and brown, and now they had a peculiar yellowish cast, like the eyes of a bird of prey.

"You're not afraid of him?" asked Roger Lincoln.

"He knows me," explained Torridon, and he stood beside the hip of the stallion and took him by the hock. The young stallion raised that leg and kicked with it, but it was only a small and feeble gesture that did not disturb Torridon's hold.

Roger Lincoln stepped up in turn, thus escorted, and laid his hand on the joint.

He fumbled at it for some moments. And, again escorted by Torridon, who was bursting with pride, the man from the Indian country thumbed and fingered the knee of Ashur, and the cannon bone beneath it.

Then he looked at the way the head was placed on the neck and put his fist beneath the jaws of the stallion while Torridon held Ashur irreverently by the nose.

At length the great man stepped back and looked at the gray mare and went over her, in turn, with as much care as he had used on the stallion.

When he had ended—and he had consumed a full half hour in this examination—"I haven't been on him, yet," he said to John Brett. "But from the ground I can tell you this. I've never seen the horse that compares with Comanche until to-day. And now I can tell you that he's as far above her as the sun is above the moon."

John Brett blinked. There was a sort of moan of joy and relief from the others.

But Roger Lincoln laid his hand on the brow of the gray.

"Poor girl," said he. "Poor girl!"

It was as though a queen had been dethroned that day!

CHAPTER VII.

HORSE AND MAN.

TORRIDON expected that the big man would, when he desired, simply leap into the saddle and gallop away on the colt. But he did nothing of the kind. First of all, he examined the girths with the greatest care and then looked to the straps. The saddle itself he seemed suspicious of, though it was new and strong. He took the measurement from his own stirrups and came back to lengthen these to the same degree. He looked well to the bit, the bridle, and above all to the reins.

Then he stepped back and said quietly to John Brett: "That colt may be spoiled. It's been petted too much!"

"Ha?" cried John Brett. "Paul Torridon, have you spoiled that horse with petting? I'll——"

He grew purple with rage; Paul Torridon grew white with fear.

"However," said Roger Lincoln, "it may turn out all right."

And he could not help a little smile, as though the sense of his own strength and skill overcame his modesty for an instant.

Then, in a trice, he had leaped into the saddle.

"Good boy!" he said gently to Ashur. "Go along. Get up!"

Ashur, as he felt the weight, turned stiff as a rock and crouched.

Torridon stepped back.

He forgot his fear of John Brett and began to grow hot with anger.

He knew very well that he had no right to feel this anger, but he could not help it when he saw Roger Lincoln on the back of Ashur.

"Get along!" said Roger Lincoln, and slapped the colt lightly on the flank.

Torridon could hardly keep back a voice that wanted to shout through his lips, tearing his throat with violence: "Don't do that! That's the wrong way! Let him go easily, give him time! He needs time to learn!"

Ashur, however, suddenly straightened and broke into a trot. It was wonderful to see the silken ease of his movement, the supple fetlocks playing under the strong drive of his legs.

From Roger Lincoln a single delightful glance flashed at John Brett. He pulled on the rein, and the colt swung slowly around while the crowd murmured: "Look! He's broken Ashur already! He's a perfect rider. What a man!"

Past John Brett came the colt, and Roger Lincoln leaned to say: "Brett, this horse is the king of the world!"

That instant Ashur acted as though he were a king indeed, and a very angry monarch.

He began to buck.

It was a coltish, clumsy beginning. He did not seem able to gather his legs under him, and he grunted when the weight of his rider beat relentlessly down on him.

Roger Lincoln laughed and kept a tight rein. With his free hand he slapped Ashur on the flanks.

"You might as well shake it out of yourself," he said.

That blow seemed to rouse a hornet's nest. Or perhaps it was that what Ashur had done before had been enough merely to warm his blood and give him a somewhat greater understanding of his powers. For now he went up into the air as though by the beat of wings, and he came down with head lowered, back humped.

The impact jarred the ground as far as where Torridon stood; and he could hear the gasp of breath driven from the body of Roger Lincoln by the shock.

But that was only the start. In that instant Ashur seemed to have learned all about bucking. He began to plunge high and come down on a stiffened foreleg, a double shock that snapped the head of Roger Lincoln heavily to the side, or down upon his breast. It was irresistible, like the snapping of a whip-lash. And yet Roger Lincoln remained in the saddle!

"Ashur can kill himself, but he'll never get Roger Lincoln off," said some one.

Torridon turned his head.

It was Nancy who had said that, Nancy looking white and fierce, with her nostrils quivering. With wonder Torridon saw that she was loving the battle.

He turned from her, a little sickened, in time to see Ashur spin like a top to the left, halt with planted hoofs that gouged up several feet of earth, and spin again in the opposite direction.

Then Roger Lincoln was flung from the saddle with incredible force.

His dignity dissolved in mid-air, so to speak. He was a whir of arms and legs, and then landed with a desperate thud, and rolled over at the very feet of Torridon!

Paul, looking down, knew by one glance at that white, senseless face and the half-open eyes that this man was badly stunned—killed, perhaps.

Then he heard a shout of men, with a tingling scream of women rising over it. People fled from about him, and there was Ashur coming like a tiger, with gaping mouth prepared to finish his victim.

"I spoiled him—I did it!" cried Paul to his own frightened, sorrowful heart.

And suddenly he was bestriding the

fallen man and stretching out both his hands to ward off the resistless rush of the stallion.

"Ashur, you fiend!" he shouted.

The great, shining black body reared itself high above him. He was looking up into a gaping mouth from which the foam flew; and the eyes of Ashur were like the eyes of a dragon; and the mighty forehoofs of Ashur, each like a steel sledge in the hands of a giant, were poised to beat him to a lifeless pulp.

Even then Torridon had time to hear: "Don't shoot!" shouted in the great voice of John Brett.

He had time to put the words together, added to an important thought—that his own life, even the added life of great Roger Lincoln, did not amount to the value of the life of Ashur, in the mind of John Brett.

Then the dreadful danger fell—but it swerved past him. The flying mane whipped his face with a hundred small lashes, and then the big horse swept away. He flaunted far off; he was a flash in the distance, with the reins tossing high above his neck.

A wave of people spilled around them. They brushed Paul aside, for of course the question was simply: What had happened to Roger Lincoln?

Torridon sank down beside a stump of a tree which marred the surface of the green pasture. He felt nauseated. When he opened his eyes the landscape spun violently. When he closed his eyes it spun with still more fury. And he felt sweat running down his face in rivulets of ice.

Voices sounded in the distance—how far in the distance they were; how hollow! They broke slowly, the sound vibrations rolling up through his body and roaring in his ears. Those were the voices of people thronging around Roger Lincoln.

At length they had picked him up and were departing toward the house. Women were scampering ahead, holding up their skirts so that they could run more rapidly. In the midst of his dizziness Paul looked after them and almost laughed, they were so like waddling ducks.

A shadow crossed him; some one dropped upon knees beside him.

"Were you hurt, Paul?" asked the voice of Nancy Brett.

It jerked one veil of the darkness from his eyes and he looked up at her amazed. She looked anxious and white. Her lips were parted.

"How is Roger Lincoln?" asked Torridon. "I think he broke his neck."

"I don't know," said Nancy. "Do you feel pain, Paul?"

"I seemed to hear it!" muttered Torridon. "I seemed to hear the bone snapping——"

He clutched his face with one hand.

"Did Ashur strike you with one of his feet?" asked Nancy. "Try to tell me, Paul!"

"He—he fell right before me, Nancy!" gasped Torridon.

"I don't care!" cried she. "I want to know about you. Did he strike you?"

She began to pass her hands over his head. Her fingers were trembling.

"I'm all right," gasped Torridon. "But I feel awfully sick."

"You'd better lie flat. Keep your eyes closed;" she ordered.

She took him by the shoulders and pushed him down. He tried to resist her.

"I don't want to be a baby. They'll think I fainted," protested Torridon, but as he tried to struggle, a shuddering dissolved his strength and he collapsed on the ground.

She sat close beside him. With a handkerchief she wiped his face. Then she began to fan him.

"Put out your hands and take hold of the grass," she said.

He obeyed.

"Is that better?"

"Yes, Nancy. It's—it's——"

"You don't have to talk. Just lie still. Just close your eyes."

He obeyed.

Presently he said: "I can feel the strength coming back."

"You'll be all right in a moment more. Your color's a lot better. It's the touch of the ground that helps. I know!"

"No, it's coming from you into me; the strength, Nancy, I mean. I think I can sit up now."

"You'd better not."

"I don't want them to see me like this. I'd rather die than have them see me."

"There. I'll help."

She drew him up and put his shoulders against the stump of the tree. He could open his eyes. The landscape no longer was spinning, and in the distance the stallion was grazing.

"Who wanted to shoot. Was it Jack?"

"Yes."

"Dear old Jack!"

Weak tears ran into his eyes.

"You'd better go away, Nancy," he murmured, and he looked down with bent head lest she should see his trembling lip and the water in his eyes.

She said simply: "Uncle John wouldn't let him shoot. He—he thought the horse was more—— Paul Torridon, you're crying like a baby!"

"I can't help it! Nancy, please, please go away!"

She stood up. He heard the rustling of her dress as she left him.

CHAPTER VIII.

PAUL AND ASHUR.

AFTERWARD he could sit on the stump, though he still was weak in the knees and in the elbows. He wished with all his heart that he had not seen the bright face of Nancy when she spoke to Lincoln that day, because if he had not, he would not have cared for her opinion so much, but now he felt dreadfully disgraced. He was a man, and he had cried at the thought of the goodness of Jack Brett.

So, clasping his hands together and tearing them apart again, he sat in suffering.

Some one came out from the house toward him. It was Charlie Brett, who of all the young men in the clan had the least good feeling for him, since they lived in the same house. Young men cannot be near one another without forming a great attachment or a profound dislike. There is no such thing as indifference.

First the idea came to the mind of the school-teacher that Nancy must have told Charles and that he had come to mock a grown man who cried like a girl.

So Torridon stood up and began to walk up and down. He made himself whistle, though he did not know the tune which puckered his lips.

But when Charlie came up he said in a respectful tone: "Dad wants to know will you come into the house, Paul? Roger Lincoln wants to talk to you."

Torridon, in duty bound, went toward the house, and Charlie went beside him, though at a little distance, for he kept his head turned toward Torridon and watched him with an intensity of awe, like a child viewing a strange monster in a cage.

Torridon was more ill at ease than ever when he came into the house. He knew that many of the methods of John Brett were terrible. Now he might choose to shame him before the entire household. He was convinced something dreadful would happen when he found that almost the whole clan was gathered in the big central room of the house. There was Roger Lincoln, reclining in John Brett's own chair, and John Brett stood behind him, looking more fierce, more sage, more patriarchal than ever before.

When Torridon came in with his light

step, in place of the universal indifference which usually greeted him, he found that all heads turned suddenly toward him, and all eyes remained fixed upon him.

They were all waiting.

He halted near the door and waited, too, tense and white, praying that the trembling in his heart might stop. But it did not stop. It grew greater. There was not even a whisper of sound. All stared at him except Roger Lincoln, who was looking down at the floor, his long hands folded in his lap.

Paul glanced around him. Yonder was Nancy Brett—the traitor who had told of his weakness. He thought at first that her faint smile was mockery, now; but then he saw that her eyes were big and tender.

Roger Lincoln looked up. He held out his hand. His handsome face lighted with a smile.

Irresistibly drawn, Torridon went up to him.

His fingers were taken in that strong and gentle clasp.

"Out yonder among the plains Indians," said Roger Lincoln, "they have a habit of showing their friendship by giving you a tepee and everything that's in it—by giving you an entire string of horses—by offering you their rifles and the scalps they've taken."

He paused, still smiling.

"White men can't offer things like that. It's too much like buying friendship. What I can say is that I love my life, Torridon. No one has a better time than I do; no one loves his life more. Well, you've saved it for me. To be killed by a horse? Bah! That's worse than to die at the hands of Sioux! But, at any rate, I want to offer you before these people—so they'll be witnesses if ever I break my word—I want to offer you my hand and everything that I have—my gun, my horse, my money, my heart, Torridon. I'm going to leave in a few moments, if I can ride. As to the black colt, you're the man to handle him. I should have seen that at the first. In the meantime, if you ever should need me, send after me. This is my mother's ring, and I'll always go back with the bearer of it to find you."

Torridon took it, feeling himself turn from cold to hot. He could not speak. There was not a word in the world that he could bring into his mind.

Then John Brett said: "The lad's lost his tongue. But he feels what you say, Lincoln. He's a good lad."

That covered Torridon's retreat as he stumbled back into the throng.

Or rather, he tried to get into it and hide himself, but he could not. They drew back from him a little in order that they could see him. Only old Aunt Ellen came and plucked at his arm with fingers like steel claws.

"The heart is the biggest half of the man," said Aunt Ellen, and cackled at him like a hen.

He moved away. He found a door and escaped.

All the world was new, delightful, gentle, bright. He moved in an ecstasy the more violent because he felt that the appreciation he had met with was undeserved. It was something for nothing. His weak tears, surely, had more than balanced that withstanding of the stallion's rush. But they were not noticed. Nancy had not said a word!

He went into the trees near the house and waited there, hot with joy, ashamed of seeing the faces of his fellows, until he saw Roger Lincoln depart, riding as straight as ever, but keeping gray Comanche at a walk. No doubt he was dreadfully hurt and shaken by his fall, but no one would have guessed it, except that the dashing rider went now so slowly. The heart of Torridon swelled with admiration and worship.

That was a man!

Some of the young men followed Roger Lincoln, making an escort for

him, as befitted his dignity, but all the others came back into the pasture near by. He saw several of the youngsters sent off by John Brett. Then the voice of the patriarch himself was raised:

"Paul! Oh, Paul! Paul Torridon!"

He came slowly out of the wood and toward them. They had smiles for him. They drew back and opened a lane to where John Brett was standing.

"Sneaked off and hid yourself, eh?" said that giant. "You act like a girl, pretty near, Paul. Now, we all come here to-day to see Ashur rode. Are you gunna disappoint us?"

Paul blanched as he thought of the plunging black monster and the form of Roger Lincoln hurtling through the air.

"Go get that hoss and ride him here!" roared John Brett.

And the force of his voice blew Torridon away.

He crossed the pasture with shaking knees, but when he was near, the stallion saw him and came trotting and tossing his head in the unaccustomed bridle.

He had broken the reins. Torridon was glad of it and of the little delay which this excused as he knotted them securely once more. Ashur in the meantime was hunting at his pockets for carrots. And, finding none, he transferred his attention to Torridon's head and began to push his hat about.

He merely turned his head curiously when Torridon put foot in the stirrup. But, when he drew himself off the ground, Ashur grunted and flinched away.

"Heaven help me!" thought Torridon.

But he was able to throw his leg over the saddle, and by kind fortune it fell exactly in the opposite stirrup.

Ashur, sprawled in a most awkward position, was reaching about and biting at the knee of his new rider. So Torridon in a shaking voice, reassured him.

"Get on!" whispered Torridon. "Good boy Ashur! If ever I've given you carrots and apples, be a good horse to-day to me!"

Ashur tossed his head and walked a few steps.

A shout of triumph rang from the far side of the pasture and Ashur leaped a dozen feet sideways in acknowledgment of it. But Torridon, braced and ready, was not unseated.

He kept the lightest touch on the reins. He made no effort to control Ashur, he merely wanted Ashur to control himself. And the colt turned his head again with a mulish expression, one ear back and one tilted forward.

Then, unbidden, he broke into a trot into a gallop; he bounded high into the air and a groan echoed heavily over the field—an expression of the boy's heart, though spoken by the crowd. Yet he kept his seat by balance only, and with the reins he barely kept in touch with the stallion letting him have his head freely, but always talking softly, steadily.

Ashur suddenly began to fly. He had been galloping fast before, but this gait had wings to it. He headed straight for the fence.

"A crash!" thought Torridon, and set his teeth and tried to hope for heaven.

Ashur rose like a bird, floated, landed lightly, and went on in his stride.

Oh, noble Ashur! The heart of the boy began to rise.

They flew through the soft meadow beyond. Ashur was loving this run! They reached the brook and, soaring high, the stallion cleared it and sped on beyond while Torridon shouted with a sudden joy. Fear had been snatched away from him. He understood now. To Ashur it was merely a frolic and the stallion rejoiced to have his old companion with him.

He pulled on the right-hand rein. The head came first. But then, understanding, Ashur curved with the pull and swung back. Once more the silver

face of the creek shot beneath them. They winged the fence to the pasture, and now, at the draw of both reins, Ashur fell to a canter, to a trot, to a walk, and came to a stop fairly before John Brett.

A shout of triumph rang up again. Ashur leaped and whirled at the same time and Torridon found himself sitting on the ground. There had been hardly a jar. The colt simply had twitched from beneath him.

"You fools!" groaned John Brett. "You've spoiled the chance with your yapping! Silence, there! Catch the horse, some of you."

There was no need, for Ashur came quickly back and sniffed at the shoulder of Torridon and stood like a rock, then, while Torridon sprang up and into the saddle again.

"He didn't mean it," said Torridon. "He goes like an old horse, without a fault. Look!"

And he began to ride Ashur in a figure eight before them all, at a trot, at a walk, at a canter.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL FOR A TORRIDON.

THERE had been three steps in the climbing of the ladder. Now, dizzy with joy, Paul Torridon found himself at the top—the most considered youth in the clan of which he was not a member.

That very night John Brett grew tired of bellowing the length of the table. He had Torridon come up and sit beside him, where they could converse about horses in general and, particularly, of that horse which was nearest to the heart of John Brett. He urged Paul to waste no time in other pursuits. The perfect breaking of the stallion so that even a child would be at home on his back was the thing for him to do now.

For a month Torridon had no other occupation. Except that he slept in the house, he was with Ashur every moment. He groomed him in the morning, fed him, watered him. Then exercise in the fresh cool of the day. Then a thorough rubdown and drying out. Then freedom in the pasture, where the teacher followed.

He was intent on rewarding John Brett for the home and the shelter which had been given to him by making an absolute masterpiece of this work which had been given into his hands. The patience which he had acquired during his wretched childhood and the added patience which he had gained by slowly grinding knowledge into the heads of young Bretts whose brains were befogged with too much outdoors now helped him in training the horse.

Already much had been done. Ashur had known the whistle and the voice of his master. He had formed the habit of absolute trust and confidence in Torridon, and when an animal believes that a man can do no wrong, nine-tenths of the battle is over. But there were other things which had to be taught, many of them; and though Ashur was a wonderfully adroit equine pupil, still the alotted month was a short time.

A month to give a horse perfect manners.

But Torridon would not be contented with that. He worked by day and he worked by night. A nervous horse would have gone mad under the coaching which this one received, but the nerves of Ashur were as steady as steel. He could have lessons for endless hours, and still take them with lightness as though they were a game.

So, one month from that first riding of the colt, John Brett and twenty others turned out to see the riding. They expected to see a fairly broken horse; they saw, instead, a masterpiece of manners.

Torridon sat the saddle with shining eyes. He had groomed Ashur until the black velvet of his skin seemed black

no longer, but flashing silver metal wherever the sun touched. Moreover, there was a change in the very physique of Ashur. A month of steady work had taken the foolish colt look out of his eyes, and the muscles were beginning to show like ropes along his thighs and shoulders. His belly was stiff with heavy power; his quarters were beginning to be defined more square and precise. From just behind, he looked strong enough to pull a plow!

With an audience to look on, Torridon rode Ashur up and down. There was no tugging at the reins, until he asked the stallion for a burst of speed which needed a bit of a pull for steadying. Ashur walked, trotted, cantered, raced. He was drawn from one pace down to another, flung from one pace into high speed again.

When Torridon checked him at last, John Brett laughed with pleasure.

"Stove polish couldn't finish him no finer, Paul," he admitted. "Now let one of the boys take him."

"There's something more," urged Torridon.

And, looping the reins over the pommel, he folded his arms and controlled the stallion by the mere sound of his voice. He started, stopped, increased speed, slowed, swerved right and left slowly, dodged right and left as though confronted by sudden danger.

Again he halted. And a good hearty shout of applause was sweet in the ears of Torridon. Even the young men joined in. For though they would have been envious of most feats of horsemanship, they felt that this youngster had risen to a class so high that he could be admired from a distance. They raised a whoop with the others, so that a crowd of crows, startled from the trees, flapped heavily away into the distance.

"There's something more," said Torridon, bursting with his pride.

Once more the reins were dropped upon the pommel, and this time Ashur went through his paces guided neither by hand nor voice. Pressure of heel or hand or sway of body accomplished all those effects. Indeed, it was not so very unusual an accomplishment. More than one plainsman had taught his favorite mount to leave his hands and voice free in the time of need. But the manners of Ashur were such a vivid contrast to those which he had possessed only a few weeks before that the watchers hardly could believe their eyes.

And to crown all, bringing the stallion back before John Brett, at an unseen signal, Torridon made him kneel, then fling himself prostrate on his side, while the rider stepped easily to the ground.

There was no need to explain the advantage of that last trick. All who might have to use their horses as breastworks in the desert against Indian attack appreciated it.

A single gesture, and Ashur sprang to his feet, shaking himself like a dog, while his bridle rang.

"Mount Charlie," said John Brett. "We'll see how Ashur goes with another."

Charlie Brett came with shining eyes, pleased to be mentioned even by his father, and eager to show how he could sit the saddle.

The stirrups were altered a little to suit him; then he sprang up.

Ashur stood like stiff iron, his ears flattened.

"Get down," said Torridon anxiously. "Get down, Charlie! He means trouble! He means trouble! Get down!"

"Stand away from his head," answered Charles Brett with perfect assurance. "If I can't ride this hoss now, I can't ride a stick. He's broke as smooth as silk."

"Uncle John," begged Torridon, for so they all termed the head of the clan, "make him get down. Ashur looks dangerous."

"Stand away," answered John Brett. "It ain't any shame to you if somebody else can ride the hoss that you've trained so slick. Let's see him run, Charlie!"

Charlie, nothing loath, leaned in the saddle, gripped hard with his knees, and tightened the reins. He had no time or need to give a starting touch of his heels. As Torridon stepped back, Ashur leaped. He was in the middle of the pasture before the first gasp of the spectators began.

Then something happened. Even Torridon, watching every instant in fear, could not be sure. The black horse seemed suddenly to be in two places at once, so swiftly did he dodge and double, and Charlie sailed from the saddle and rolled over and over on the ground.

He came to his feet again with a shout of terror, running for his life, and with good reason, for the stallion was about and after him with tigerish eagerness.

"Shoot!" screamed a woman.

The whistle of Torridon went like a needle through the air. The stallion tossed his head and, swerving from the fugitive, came back in a broad sweep toward the crowd. They scattered with cries of fear as though they expected him to crash straight through them.

But Torridon was his goal, and before his master he stopped, mischief still hot and bright in his eyes, stamping and dripping from exercise.

John Brett lowered the rifle which he had just raised. He turned to Torridon with a grave face.

"Paul," he said, "I'll not forgive you if you been making that a one-man hoss!"

Torridon could not answer. The peril in which Charlie had been placed, and his own astonishment, stifled him, and he stared helplessly back at the patriarch.

"Jack!" called John Brett. "We'll make this thing sure, now. Jack, will you take a chance in that saddle?"

Jack, pale but determined, came from the crowd, settling his hat more firmly on his head.

"Go with him," cautioned John Brett.

But as Jack mounted, Torridon already was hurrying to the side of his friend.

"Take him easily—talk to him!" he cautioned. "I don't know what's in him! He's never tried anything like this with me!"

Jack spoke, indeed, but his quiet voice had no effect on the big black. Ashur stood trembling, ready to spring into the air. He kept turning his proud, fierce head to Torridon, thrusting at his shoulder with his nuzzle as though asking impatiently why this indignity should be.

"I'll try him now," said Jack, and turned the head of the colt well away from its teacher.

The trial lasted not half a second. Two whiplash leaps and stops dropped Jack as though he had been struck from the saddle by a club, and the stallion wheeled at him furiously, always intent to kill.

The horrified cry of Torridon stopped him; he came back to Paul and danced like a savage panther behind him, looking over his shoulder at the world and champing foam from his bit.

Jack staggered to his feet and stood straight.

"He turned into a steel cable on springs," said Jack quietly. "And then somebody got hold of the far end of the cable and cracked it a couple of times under me."

He smiled, but his eyes were still blank with the shock which he had received.

Back they went to John Brett and the murmuring, horror-stricken crowd.

"I'll teach somebody to handle him," protested Torridon eagerly. "I know that with time I can do it."

John Brett smiled bitterly.

"I spent half my life at the breeding

of that hoss," he said with unbreakable gloom. "And now it sort of looks like I'd done all of that work for a Torridon."

He turned on his heel and walked toward the house, and for the first time in many months Torridon felt the gulf open at his feet. He was a Torridon; they were Bretts. Nothing on earth could heal the breach!

CHAPTER X.

NONE SO BLIND.

AUTUMN and the school year were at hand now, but Torridon worked feverishly through the interim to try to teach one member of the household to back the stallion with safety. Charlie was the willing pupil. To Charlie he taught the whistle, the call; to Charlie he taught the tricks of guiding without reins, by voice, by gesture and signal, by sway of the body.

It was utterly of no avail.

Released from the hand of his master, the black colt was a tiger instantly. Twice a serious mauling of Charlie was barely averted, and Charlie gave up the effort. John Brett, when this was explained to him, smiled, half sadly, and half in anger. But he spoke no more about the colt. One might have thought that Ashur was no more to him than a shadow of a horse.

But Torridon knew better, and watching that stern, cold face, he saw that he had outworn his welcome among this clan of his enemies. The court takes its tone from the king; all eyes fell coldly upon him, except the eyes of Nancy and those of Jack.

Those two, stanch as oak, did not alter. One day Jack stopped at the house with word that Nancy wanted to see him.

"She's gone out riding up Bramble River. You'd catch her along that road, Paul, if you rode Ashur."

Paul saddled Ashur in haste.

The way to the Bramble River led through a semicircle of trails and roads, but with Ashur it was possible to go cross-country like a bird. There was sadness in the heart of Torridon as he went, for it might be the last day he backed the stallion. At any moment he expected from John Brett the command never to go near the black colt again.

They reached the river road at last. It was not really a road. No one ever had leveled it, but strong wagons had been dragged along its course more than once, and where wheels once had traveled, it was the custom to speak of a road. It was in reality merely a winding hint of a trail, twisting back and forth among the trees. Then Paul saw a rider before him, a woman. He called to Ashur, and the stallion swept up to her like the wind.

She had turned to face them, laughing with pleasure at the speed of the horse. Laughing more than a little, felt Torridon, at his own eagerness.

"You wanted me, Nancy?"

"Let's sit down," said Nancy. "There's a rock by the water. And Ashur's such a silly fool. He's always dancing."

They tethered Nan's gelding to a tree. Ashur, certain not to stray, was turned loose, and the two sat on a table-topped rock at the verge of the river. Their feet were on sand as clean and white as the sand of a sea beach. The broad river swept before them. Moving water hypnotizes. Torridon began to feel that they were on an island together—then that the island had broken adrift and was sweeping out into the stream.

Nancy had not spoken. He looked at her presently, startled. He found that she was smiling with thoughtful eyes.

"You'd forgotten that I was with you, I think," said she.

"Oh, no," said he, and turned a brilliant red, thereby confessing.

"Well," said Nancy, nodding. "That's

books. They take you away from things."

He looked at her with frightened eyes. She was so practical and so full of common sense, often, that he was in awe of her. She differed from the others of her clan. They simply could understand nothing but the earth and things of the earth. That vague, cloudy universe in which he lived they never entered. But Nancy could enter it, if she chose. She knew all about it, he felt, and she wanted none of it. She preferred facts, it seemed. He respected Nancy, and her beauty delighted him, but he was afraid of her. He always had been afraid of her, from the first day when he met her judicial eyes in the school.

"Yes," he said vaguely.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I wanted to talk to you about yourself," said Nancy.

Paul sat up straight. He picked up a stick and jabbed it nervously into the strip of white sand.

"Don't do that," said Nancy. "You're making the mud show through."

He threw the stick away with a nervous gesture and clasped his hands together.

She went on: "What are you going to do with yourself, Paul?"

"I don't know," said he. "I don't know what you mean, exactly."

"Just what I say. For instance, what are you going to do this winter?"

"Teach the school, of course."

"How old are you, Paul?"

"I'm nineteen. That makes you eighteen, doesn't it?"

"Do you know that much about me?"

She laughed a little, nodding to herself, laughing at him. And he flushed again. Color always was coming and going in his pale face with every emotion.

"You won't teach the school, though," said she, "if you're wise."

"And why, Nan?"

"Because you're a Torridon," she said bluntly.

She frowned, driving home her point with cruelty.

"I've always been a Torridon."

"Different, though."

"Just as much before."

"You were only a boy. Children don't count so much."

"I'm not so very old now," said Torridon anxiously.

"You're a great deal older than you think."

"Why do you say that?"

"You're always looking forward, thinking that you're going to grow bigger."

"I didn't think you'd taunt me with that," said Torridon, straightening his shoulders and growing crimson with shame and sorrow.

"Don't be silly. I don't mean your size. You're big enough. I only mean —in your mind. You keep thinking that you'll change. Perhaps you will. You feel like a child, now, compared to what you hope to be. But the Bretts don't see things that way. When a boy has his height, he's a man. We'll, you're a man to us!"

He was silent. There was so much truth in what she said that he could not answer. He was depressed. One always is downhearted when it appears that another knows the truth about one. Conversation flows out of mysteries, half knowings, partial revealings of what is kept securely hidden, more securely hidden because it is half revealed.

"I'm just the same as I was last year," said he.

"You're not, though," she replied with her usual assurance.

"What's made the difference?"

"That!"

She pointed to Ashur.

"Speak to him," she said.

"Ashur!" said he.

The stallion jerked up his head and

looked on his master with bright eyes of love and trust.

"That's made the difference," said the girl.

He shook his head, bewildered.

"I mean, when you were a boy, it didn't matter. But after you mastered the school, and big Jack——"

"I didn't master Jack."

"What did happen, then?" she asked sharply, still frowning at him. "Don't talk small, Paul, to make me talk big about what you've done!"

"I think you're a little rude," said Paul Torridon, so angry and proud that he was about to spring to his feet and leave her.

"Nonsense," said the girl. "You're very hard to handle. You're just like —a girl!"

He did leap up, then.

"I think I'll go home," said he.

She answered calmly: "What home?"

"Why, to Uncle John's place, of course."

"He's not your uncle."

Torridon tried to answer. He could not, and because he was unable to find a word he began to hate Nancy.

"And his house isn't your home, Paul!"

"Is that what you brought me here to tell me?"

"Just exactly," said Nancy. "When you were a child, that was different. Then you changed into a youngster. You showed that you had something in you when you turned Jack into a sort of—slave to you."

"Slave? What are you talking about, Nancy? You're just—you're just trying to make me angry."

"What else is he?" said the girl. "Does he do anything without coming to you for advice? Does he ever think anything out for himself? Look at last year. He wanted to marry Charlotte. He went to you, and you told him he'd better save a lot of money first, and build a cabin before he married her. So she got tired of waiting and married Will Morgan."

The dreadful truth of this was dropped upon him, a load that bowed his shoulders.

"I thought it was best," he said stiffly.

"Perhaps it was best. That's not the point at all. You'd better sit down, Paul."

"I think maybe I'm needed back at the house," replied Paul.

"No, you're not!"

"See here, Nancy. Don't you talk like this any more," he cried at her. "I won't listen. You're just trying to upset me."

Nancy stamped lightly on the sand. It made a crisp sound under her foot.

"You—you baby!" cried Nancy. "You won't dare to open your eyes and see facts. You're afraid of the truth!"

He braced himself, actually planting his feet to withstand the shock.

"What truth?" he asked her.

"That you've turned into a man—that the whole lot of us knew it the day you saved Roger Lincoln. Saved Roger Lincoln—think of that! And then you rode Ashur yourself! We knew that day that you were a man. We knew that you were a Torridon. We began to hate you from that minute, and you're afraid to see it. You won't see it or admit it till somebody shoots you through the back!"

CHAPTER XI.

BY THE RIVER'S BRIM.

HE sat down, not because he felt more kindly toward the girl, or because he was more prepared to listen to the truths which she was telling him, but because her last words had tapped him behind the knees and unstrung the sinews, so to speak.

He began to fumble at his cold face with one hand, flashing glances at her, and then at the brightness of the river.

She sat bolt upright, with her head high, looking straight at him.

"You *do* hate me, I see," said Torridon.

"Is your lip trembling?" she asked, coldly and sternly.

"Oh, Nancy," he exclaimed, "how can you be so brutal?"

"I can't be brutal to you," she said. "I'm only a weak girl. And you're a strong man!"

He opened his eyes at her. He parted his lips.

"A strong man?" he repeated. Then he laughed bitterly and added: "You're wicked enough to keep taunting me, too!"

She exclaimed with impatience.

"I suppose I have to prove it to you!" she said. "What do you mean by strength?"

"Oh, Nancy," sighed the boy, "does it give you pleasure to show you that I know? Well—there you are—look at them—look at my hands!"

He flung them out before her—slender, delicately made hands.

"Well," she said, "suppose you had big hands. What could you do with them?"

He laughed bitterly and jerked up his head. "I could—well, I could throw logs around as if they were matchwood."

"Humph!" said Nancy.

"I could—I could knock down a bull!"

"Like Jack, you mean?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, what a man Jack is!"

"And who is Jack's master?" she said.

"Don't talk like that, Nancy. Of course I'm not his master."

"You are, you are!" said she.

"This is just saying 'yes' and 'no' like children. You can believe that, if you want to."

"Who is the strongest man that ever came among us—the bravest, most wonderful man?"

"Do you mean Roger Lincoln?"

"Of course I mean Roger Lincoln."

"Yes," nodded the boy with interest.

"Well, then, who was it that got the affection of Roger Lincoln when he came? Who was it that become a sort of brother to Roger Lincoln? Which of the strongest men in the clan?"

"That?" murmured Paul. "That was just a sort of accident."

"Does Roger Lincoln like weak men?" she asked sharply. "Is he a fool? Does he offer his friendship forever to fools and weaklings?"

Torridon was agape.

Then he said slowly: "I can't carry a pack the way they do, Nan. My legs buckle under the weight."

"Horses are for carrying packs," said she.

"If I wrestle—even the youngsters can throw me down."

"Partly because you don't put any heart into it. You take it for granted that you'll be beaten. Besides, men don't fight with wrestling—they don't fight with bare hands."

"They fight with rifles!" he exclaimed. "And what am I with a rifle? They're too heavy for me!"

"You haven't tried one for years. You know you haven't. You could handle a rifle now just as well as any one."

He started to deny this, but hesitated. It was true that he had not made the attempt for a long time.

"You just give up," said the girl. "You just sit and wring your hands like an old woman. But you have a pistol."

He started.

"Jack told you that?"

"Yes, Jack tells me everything. Look! Could you hit that with your pistol?"

She picked up a pebble and tossed it a dozen yards away.

"Perhaps," he said.

He drew the pistol and fired. The pebble disappeared.

Then he began to reload, absentmindedly, never looking at his gun.

"Well," said the girl after a moment, "who else among us could do that?"

"What does a pistol matter?" he said sadly.

"Suppose that pebble had been the heart of a man?" said the girl.

"I never thought of that," muttered he.

Then he added: "Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Leave us while you have a chance to leave. While you have life in you!"

"You don't think they'd murder me, Nancy? Why should they want to? What have I ever done to them?"

"You've stolen Ashur."

"No, no, no! I wouldn't dream of doing it!"

"You don't understand. You have to hear it in words of one syllable, I suppose. Well, why do wolves kill a dog?"

"Why, because—because they're different, and——"

"That's why the Bretts will kill you. Because you're different. You're a Torridon." She went on, gravely: "There's not a man or a woman in the tribe who likes you, except Jack. There's not one that doesn't hate you, really; or they would hate you, if any one encouraged them to do it. The young men are jealous of you. The girls don't understand you. They think you despise them because you never go near them."

"But, Nancy, how crazy that is! I'm simply afraid of them!"

"Well, I've told you what you ought to know."

He dropped his chin on his hand. After a while he could hear the rustling of the water; again, the noise of the horses, grinding the grass with their powerful jaws.

"Now, Paul, tell me just what's in your mind this very minute."

"I—a great many things."

"I want to know exactly what you're seeing and thinking and hearing."

"How all the gold and red and purple from the trees and the bushes floats in the stream there. It never is drowned, Nancy. Nothing that's real seems to be worth while. Do you see?"

"I don't see. Why do you look at the trees in the water, and not on the bank, just opposite, and all around us?"

"Well, those trees will lose all their leaves the first strong wind that comes along. But their images in the water—you see where the still water is, around the curve?—they stand in the water taller and bigger and brighter than they really are. You can see the blue of the sky, too, and a bright streak of cloud all filled with sun. That's not real, so you can look at that picture in the water and it will never die. It's like a thought. You see that, Nancy?"

She nodded and muttered something.

"There is no wind to go moaning and mourning through the branches that are reflected there, Nan. That's important, I think. Now, while I look at that picture, I'm hearing all the humming and buzzing and whirring and singing of the insects: The hornets, and the wasps, and the bumblebees and the bees, and the crickets and the flies, and the grasshoppers. They aren't real noises. If you speak you put out all those sounds. Well, you see how it is. You just sit close to the ground with your eyes and your ears open, and you gather things in. All those things die. They're singing just for this autumn only. Two days together the sounds will never be the same singing exactly. So it's better to shut your eyes on things as they are and see them as you want them to be."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Nancy briskly. "I've told you that you're in danger of your life and you start in thinking about reflections in the water, and humming bees. I'm finished, Paul. I'll never try to do anything for you again! I just suspected that it would be like this."

"You want me to go away," said he, looking deep in the quivering beauty that lay in golden towers inlaid with

blue in the river. "Well, I would have to leave Ashur if I went."

"A man can live without a horse," said she. "Besides, you'll have your memory of Ashur, you know. And memories and thoughts, they're all that you really care about."

He was so earnestly intent that he failed to see the sarcasm.

"Oh, no, they're not; not always, I mean. There's Ashur. I can't use him for a starting point and go on imagining finer horses. He's perfect. He just fills my mind. I can't imagine him made differently."

"Perhaps you can't," said the girl. "Well, Ashur would go with you if you whistled to him even."

He shook his head.

"Then I would be leaving good old Jack."

"I think good old Jack would follow you, too, Paul."

"Suppose that I had Jack and Ashur —of course I couldn't have either of them! — but just supposing — then there'd still be you left behind me!"

"I?" said Nancy in an oddly altered voice. "*That* would be hard for you, of course."

He was perfectly serious still.

"Even if I ran away," he went on, "I would have to come slipping back to try to see you. Do you know why I want school to begin? So that I can see you every day. You are *so* beautiful, Nancy!"

"Paul!" cried a breathless voice. "I don't see why you're saying this!"

He stared gloomily at the lovely waters.

"Oh, I know that you don't care! But you've started me confessing. Do you mind if I go on about you?"

"No," said she, "perhaps you'd better. You don't simply hate me for being so blunt?"

"Hate you? What an idea! Why, Nancy, sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and I want to see you so much that I almost jump up out of bed to go and stand under your window. Sometimes when I think of you I feel—I feel——"

He became silent.

"You were saying," she prompted in a faint voice—"when you think about me, Paul——"

"I feel the way a dog sounds when it bays the moon."

He laughed a little. Nancy did not laugh.

"I think of your mother and your father, Nancy. They have you every day!"

"And they have no other child. And I'm only a girl!"

"You?" cried Torridon. "You? Only a girl? Why, Nancy," he went on, carried away, and turning upon her, "you're the most beautiful thing in the world, and the sweetest—although you frighten me terribly, you're so cold and grave——"

He stopped in mid-gesture, mid-speech.

Great, bright, glistening tears were running rapidly down Nancy's face.

He could not believe it. But most of all it was wonderful that she did not try to conceal them. She simply kept on looking straight at him with wide eyes. As if she were looking through him, and not at him. It was like the falling of proud towers, like the rushing of great walls and the battlements to the earth, so that a city was revealed in all its undefended beauty.

"I suppose you're finished," said Nancy.

"Oh, Nancy," he stammered, "I never meant to hurt you. I never dreamed, no matter what I said, you'd ever care. Tell me what I've done, and how I can make up for it? I wouldn't care if I had to work on my knees all the rest of my life."

And he fell on his knees before her as he spoke. His heart was aching terribly. But he could not tell whether it

was joy or sorrow that swelled it so greatly.

"I don't want you to work on your knees," said Nancy. "But I think you ought to kiss me, Paul!"

CHAPTER XII.

AWAKENING!

THEY went back down the road side by side slowly, their horses close. Outstretching branches brushed at their faces. The moist odor of decaying leaves was pungent from the woods, and here and there were faintly tangled suggestions of wood smoke, drawn from far away and drooping down again, to be caught among the trees.

The day was wearing late, past the heat of the afternoon; the sun in the west was turning gold, but they rode in the shadow of the valley. All about them the autumn colors which had looked like scarlet enamel, gold leaf, and burnished Tyrian purple under the higher sun, now were filmed across with delicacy. But the heads of the trees lifted into a more brilliant beauty than ever before, yet harmonizing more, drawn from one into another by the golden softness of the light.

It was, in a way, like passing through water and looking up to the day. It was like riding through thin winter mist, except that not winter chill, but summer warmth, was above them.

As they drew down the broadening valley they looked from a gap in the trees and saw a house in the distance. All its western windows flared like polished metal; blue-white smoke rose kindly above it. And suddenly the two lovers looked at one anoeher with inexpressible tenderness and joy.

"What shall I do?" said he. "Tell me, Nancy. You think better than I do."

"Make a small pack of your clothes to-night as soon as you are in your room alone. Then, when the house is still, come out and to my house."

"Nancy, Nancy, what do you mean?"

"Are you frightened?"

"I'm trying not to be," he said. "I want to be a hero for you Nancy, darling."

"You will be," said she slowly, looking at him half critically, half smiling. "You always will be when the danger really comes! But you'll come?"

"If you told me to ride down into the river I'd never dream of disobeying."

They laughed together, she softly, he on a broken note.

"I'll be waiting for you before eleven o'clock," she went on. "I'll have two horses—I don't suppose that you'd bring Ashur?"

He looked down to the beautiful head of the horse and stroked the stallion's neck, and the colt turned its head and looked back to him.

"If you think it would be stealing ——" said Nancy. "Well, but they'll never be able to make any use of it when you're away."

"I want him more than diamonds," he said sadly. "More than masses and masses of diamonds, Nancy dear. But I——"

He looked at her in apology, and she shrugged her shoulders.

"I'll be waiting with two horses, then. *I* don't mind stealing."

"It's all that I'd ever take from your father. And usually fathers give their children something. We'll give ours everything!"

"Oh, yes," said she, with tears in her eyes.

Then, after a little pause, she added: "By the poplars beside our house I'll wait for you. I'll have some money, too. I have some of my own."

"You give me everything, and I give you nothing," cried Torridon in anguish.

"You will give later, dear."

"I have this one thing to give you. Do you see?"

He took her hand. "Here is this ring."

"This? This is the ring of Roger Lincoln. See his initials on the seal?"

"It's all I have."

"You mustn't give this away."

"I must. It makes me happier to think of giving you something."

He slipped it on her finger. She did not look at it, but at him. There was such joy in them that for a moment they remained speechless, worshiping one another.

"We haven't decided where to go, dear."

"We'll go to the Torridons over the mountains—my people, dear Nancy."

"What would they feel if you came back to them out of death and brought a Brett with you?"

"They would love you. Everybody loves you, Nancy."

"We'd better go to a new place, Paul."

She shook her head.

"I don't care."

"We could go West. Beyond the river."

"Into the Indian countries?"

"Into the free countries," said she.

"I don't care. Oh, Nancy, what a kind world it is!"

"Now I must go home. Poor old Jack! What will he do when you're gone?"

"Would he want to come, Nancy?"

"He'd go to the end of the world with you and me."

"Shall we tell him?"

"If you want to."

"You tell him if you think best, Nancy."

"I shall, then. Good-by."

"I hate that word," said he. "Only for a little while."

She held out her arms to him and he took her close to him. There was fragrance in her hair; her eyes were looking up to him; he began to tremble.

"Paul Torridon, Paul Torridon," she said, "Heaven give you to me, and Heaven give me to you!"

He watched her ride away. When she was at the next bending of the trail she turned and waved back to him; then the trees swallowed her, but still the beat of her horse in full gallop sounded faintly.

"If that should be my last sight of her!" said Torridon to his soul.

Then he looked up and saw that the sun was down, and all the glory was stolen, even from the heads of the autumn trees. He shivered with his thought and with the sudden cold.

Then he rode home, taking the slow way, the roundabout way. It was well enough to gallop madly across country, flying the fence. But that was before he belonged to another, and now what would Nancy do without him!

Still he could not entirely believe, and before he reached the house he pinched himself once or twice, wondering if it were real, not all a dream. If, after all, she had not been making a cruel game with him, drawing out his folly so that she could tell her people, and then all of them would laugh long and loudly.

He was still tormented by that foolish dream when he came in the dusk toward the house.

It was all dark, and he wondered at that, though doubtless only in the kitchen and dining room were the lamps lit at this hour. He had no sooner come to that conclusion than three or four men started out of the brush.

"Who goes there?" cried one of them.

Paul reined in his horse. He was too shocked to make a quick answer.

"Answer!" called a voice which he thought must be that of Charlie Brett. "Answer, or we'll blow you to bits! Who are you?"

"Why, it's only Paul Torridon," said he. "Is that you, Charlie?"

"Don't 'Charlie' me, you murdering traitor!" answered young Brett. "Get off that hoss, will you? Get off and get off quick!"

Paul dismounted. He leaned against

the shoulder of the stallion, unable to believe that such things could be.

Had they spied upon him and seen beautiful Nancy in his arms? That must be it!

They were all about him. Charlie caught one of his arms. Will Brett caught another. They lashed his wrists together behind his back.

Finally he could ask: "But what does it mean, Will? What does it mean? What have I done?"

"What have you done? You ask that! You and a dozen of your sneaking Torridons ain't come down on the Harry Bretts and wiped them out, I suppose?"

"What!" breathed the boy.

"You spy!" cried Charlie, furious. "I could thrash you! I could thrash you within an inch of your life! You sneaking spy! We're gunna burn you to a crisp. Walk on!"

And they jerked Paul Torridon headlong up the path toward the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

DOWN!

THEY dragged Torridon straight in before old John Brett, and the latter regarded him with bent brows.

"Paul Torridon," said he, "I've been keeping you in my house for twelve years or more. I've kept you in food and clothes and I've given you easy work. Your own father wouldn't've treated you half as good. How've you paid me back?"

Torridon looked earnestly back into the face of the clansman. It was not contorted with anger. It was simply hard and cold. He glanced rapidly at the others. Their passion was less under control than that of their leader. They stared at him with hungry malice.

"They say that Harry Brett has been 'ed," said Torridon.

"He's been raided. That was news to you, maybe?"

"It was," answered Torridon calmly.

The peril was too great to be feared. In the den of the snakes, one forgets the fear of death. So Torridon was surrounded with malice and rage.

"No," said John Brett ironically, "it's more likely that one of the Bretts themselves sent on word to those hounds of Torridons beyond the mountains! That's a pile more likely!"

Torridon was silent. He was determined not to speak until words had a chance of benefiting him.

"It was one of the Bretts," went on the leader, "that must've let the Torridons know that the three men was away from the house and that there was no one but boys and women there!"

"Did they—did they hurt—the women?" asked Paul Torridon, horror-stricken.

John Brett leaned forward in his chair.

"You didn't aim on that, eh?" said he. "You only wanted to have the men wiped out?"

"Uncle John," said Torridon earnestly, "will you tell me what I have to gain by an attack on the house of Harry Brett?"

"What has any Torridon to gain?" asked John Brett. "What have the snakes in the field to gain by sneaking up and biting a man that's sleeping?"

Torridon was silenced.

"They've come before you was ready, and I can believe that," said John Brett. "You figured that tomorrow, maybe, would be better. Then you'd slip away on Ashur. Was that the plan?"

Still Torridon did not speak, and Charles Brett stepped in from the side and struck him heavily in the face. The blow knocked him with a crash against the wall. He staggered back onto the floor, his head spinning. The hard knuckles of Charlie had spit the skin over his cheek bone and a trickle of blood ran down rapidly.

Then, as his brain cleared, he looked to John Brett to hear some correction of that brutality, but there was no change in the expression of the chief.

"Answer when he speaks to you, you dog!" Charlie had said as he struck the blow.

"He's gunna play Injun on us and keep his mouth shut," suggested Will Brett.

"Shut up!" John Brett commanded his younger men. "I'll do the talking here, please. You, Torridon"—he spoke the name as though it were cinders and ashes in his mouth—"you speak up and tell me where the band of murderin' sneaks will be hiding now."

Torridon sighed.

"Is it likely that I know?" he asked.

"You dunno nothing, maybe?" asked the chief with heavy irony.

"I've never spoken to a Torridon in my life—that I can remember," said the boy.

"You didn't put it into a letter?"

"I've never written to one of them, either."

"It's a lie!" broke in Charles Brett, unable to control himself. "Is it likely, I ask you now, that any skunk of a Torridon would spend twelve years without getting in touch with his people?"

John Brett accepted that suggestion with a nod of agreement.

"It ain't likely. It ain't possible," he stated. "You see, Paul, there ain't any use in trying to fool with us. It'll be easier for you to come straight out with the truth. And if you can get us to the place where we'll find your murdering crew, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll turn you free, Paul. I'll turn you free and see you safe and livin' out of the valley! No man could offer you more than that!"

"Uncle John," said the boy in a trembling voice, "I swear——"

"My name is John Brett," corrected the patriarch sternly, "and the oaths of the Torridons never was worth the breath that was needed for the speaking of them. Talk on, and leave out the swearing."

Paul Torridon sighed again.

"I don't even know what's actually happened," said he. "And you want to kill me because I can't talk."

"You dunno?" said John Brett. "I'll tell you, then! I'll tell you that there was four boys in the house of Harry Brett. The oldest was fourteen. The youngest was nine. There was a girl of seventeen and there was Elizabeth Brett, who's forty. That house was rushed this afternoon. One of the boys got away to tell us what happened. He saw two of his brothers murdered. He saw Elizabeth Brett shot through the head——"

"Stop, stop!" whispered Torridon, and grew sick and dizzy with horror.

"You don't like it?" sneered John Brett. "There's many a cook that don't relish the dish of his own makin'! But you're gunna help to pay us back for this here, Torridon. You're going to help to pay us back!"

"Listen!" said Torridon, arguing for his life. "If the Torridons came to find some Bretts, as they came through the mountains, isn't the house of Harry Brett the first one they'd come to? Isn't that the reason that they attacked the house?"

"Then how did they know that Harry and his two brothers wasn't at the place?"

"They scouted about it, first."

"He's got an answer for everything," said Will Brett. "Ain't he a professional word-user? Ain't he a schoolteacher? Let's listen to him no more! By grab, Uncle John, it's time that we tied him to a tree and built a fire under his feet—so's we could see to do our shooting!"

John Brett smiled. It was plain that the horrible suggestion was exactly after his own heart.

"You hear him, Torridon?" he asked.

"I hear him," answered the boy.

"That's what'll be done to you unless you talk up."

"There's nothing I can say."

Charlie Brett seized his shoulder viciously.

"Is that all, Uncle John?" he asked. "Can we have him?"

John Brett had lurched from his chair. The savagery of a barbarian was working in his features, and yet he controlled himself.

"Joe Brett has been taken away by the Torridons. It may be that we'll have to keep this rat to trade in for Joe. Throw him into the cellar. And keep a watch at the cellar door. Tie him hand and foot and keep a watch. If he gets away I'll skin you and hang up your hides to show the Bretts what happens to fools!"

They carried poor Torridon away with them, wrenching and dragging him along.

The creaking cellar door was heaved open and big Charlie said: "Lemme put him down there. Tie his legs with that rope, Will!"

It was done. The legs of Torridon were lashed securely together.

"Now stand him up!" directed Charles Brett.

They stood up Torridon like a ninepin. And Charlie Brett drove at him with all his might.

Excess of malice spoiled his aim. Instead of landing full in the center of the face, the blow glanced on the side of Torridon's head, but nevertheless it was enough to hurl him backwards down the steps.

He felt himself going and purposely made his limbs and body limp. He landed at the bottom of the steps on the damp floor, rolled over and over, and crashed against a big box.

There he lay.

He was too overwhelmed with woe to think clearly, but he was able to say to himself that after bright day comes the black night.

Now Nancy was at her house. She, too, was hearing the tale of the raid upon the house of Harry Brett. Would she believe that he had conspired against the slaughtered family?

Then he tried to work out the matter in his mind—tried to conceive how people who bore his name, in whose veins his blood flowed, could have contemplated such a horrible massacre—far less, actually have done the thing!

And after that he lay still without even a thought. He heard feet stamp on the floor above him. He heard loud voices, once or twice. Faintly he could hear the murmur of ordinary conversation. And after a long time there was a rattle of hoofs.

The first division of hunters for the marauding Torridons were coming back, no doubt! And what sort of a report would they make? Had they found their quarry? Had they shot them down like dogs? Or were the destroyers safely away through the woods and into the throat of the mountain pass?

No one came near him for several hours. Then the cellar door was lifted and a glimmer of lantern light broke into the pitchy darkness.

Charles Brett, with old Aunt Ellen behind him, came down into the improvised dungeon. He kicked the prisoner roughly in the side.

"Wake up," he commanded, though he could see by his lantern that the eyes of the boy were wide open.

"Leave him be," said Aunt Ellen. "Leave him be. I'm gunna just sit down here and comfort him a little. You go on up and leave the lantern down here with me."

Charlie merely paused to leer at Torridon.

"Things has changed a little, eh?" said he. "You ain't so much the cock of the walk now. I'll show you who's on top, you hound!"

He left them, and Aunt Ellen sat down on a broken box beside the boy and uncovered a steaming dish.

"You gotta eat, dear Paul," said she. "You gotta eat and save your strength, because maybe you'll be needing all of it one of these days!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TALE OF TORRIDON.

IT was good roast beef, cut in large chunks. And Torridon, wriggling until he could prop his back against a musty barrel's side, ate heartily and then drank the coffee which she had brought with her also.

She looked like a witch, crouched over an evil deed. But as he ate she patted him. She brushed the mold and the damp of the cellar from his face and hair. Then she smiled and nodded at him.

"Aunt Ellen," he could not help bursting out, "I always thought that you hated me, and here you are taking care of me! The only one who cares at all!"

"It's little that I can do for you, lad," said she.

"You can go to Uncle John and tell him that I've sworn to you that I never was in touch with the Torridons. And Heaven knows if I had been there I would have fought to keep the poor children safe from those brutes! Aunt Ellen, it's not possible that he or you believe that I could have helped at such a thing!"

"I wouldn't dare to go near to Uncle John this night," said the crone. "He's as black as the raven and as cold as steel, since the boys come home and said that they couldn't get no trace of the killers."

"No trace!" murmured the prisoner.

"It's a weary, weary night," said Aunt Ellen. "There ain't been the like of it in the mountains since the night when Hugh Torridon and his people was killed!"

"Who was Hugh Torridon?" asked the boy.

"Now, now, now!" said she. "Would you be wantin' me to believe that you never heard tell of Hugh Torridon?"

"Never," he assured her earnestly.

"Ah, but that's a story!" said she "And if I stay here to tell it to you——"

"Do stay, Aunt Ellen," he pleaded. "Do stay, because after you go I'll have all the long, black, cold night ahead of me. I'll be half dead before morning with the damp and the chill, and the horrible smell of the rats, Aunt Ellen!"

"Will you, now?" said she, running her hand gently over his head again. "But what if I stay so long down here comfortin' you that John Brett raises his voice after me? He's got a voice that has to be heard!"

She did not wait for an answer, but went on: "Hugh Torridon! Hugh Torridon! And you never heard of him?"

"I always was afraid to ask about the Torridons," said the boy. "It always made the Bretts angry to be reminded that there were more people of my name in the world."

"D'you know why there's any Torridons alive to-day?" she asked curiously.

"Tell me, Aunt Ellen."

"Because of Hugh Torridon. It was him that brought the Torridons up from nothing. They was beaten. Their backs was against the wall when I was a girl. They didn't have nothing. They was so poor you wouldn't believe it. And then Hugh come.

"He was young, but he could talk. He persuaded the whole pack of them to move across the mountains and start farming there. The climate was better and the ground was richer, and pretty soon the Torridons on that side of the mountains was a lot better off than ever they had been on this side. It was a surprisin' thing how quick they began to make money and get respectable lookin' again! Pretty soon they was about as rich as the Bretts!"

She paused and waggled her head at this important thought.

Then she went on: "After they was strong enough, with all good horses and with all the best kind of pistols and rifles and knives, and everything that men kill deer and each other with, they begun to march in back through the mountains, and when they found a Brett here and there, they just nacherally shot him.

"Hugh Torridon had the leading of them. He was an iron man. Bullets would bounce off of him, the young men here used to say. Uncle John was a young man, then!"

She chuckled with the idea.

"The Torridons, they kept walking deeper and deeper into our valleys. I remember when they swept all the cattle off my pa's place."

Then she went on: "This man died, and he left a young son, also called Hugh; and the young son, he was raised to remember how his father died and to try to get even for it."

"And how *did* the first Hugh Torridon die, Aunt Ellen?"

"As he was ridin' down the river side," said she. "There was a couple of clever young Bretts lyin' in the brush, and they shot him after he'd gone by."

"Through the back!" said the boy, writhing.

"One bullet was under the shoulder blade and another was right in the middle of the spine. He didn't make no noise. He just died and dropped out of the saddle.

"Now then, his son, the second Hugh, he come up to his manhood as big and as brave as his father, but he didn't have the brain. Brains is what wins for everybody. You got brains, poor Paul! That's why you been amounting to something. But anyways, I gotta tell you that this second Hugh, he couldn't have no pleasure in staying on the far side of the mountains, and so he built him a house of strong logs right over our heads on this slope. We always could see the smoke going up from his place. And he done a lot of harm to us, until finally Uncle John thought it would be a good idea to make a truce. So a truce was made between the Torridons and the Bretts.

"And after that a couple of years went by, peaceful and quiet, but all the while Uncle John was plannin' and waitin'. And finally he went down with ten good men. Only ten, because more might've made too much noise. He took those men and went to the house of Hugh Torridon and he pried the front door off its hinges, very quiet.

" 'Who's there?' " sings Hugh Torridon from the darkness.

"But already they was inside. They got into the first room where there was Hugh Torridon's wife and baby. And Hugh Torridon, when he heard them two screaming—he sort of lost his wits!"

"Don't! Don't!" cried the boy. "You don't mean that they murdered a woman with a baby beside her?"

"A Torridon is a Torridon, young or old, male or female. Uncle John is the one who knows that! But I was tellin' you that Hugh Torridon come smashing along down the hall and got at that room, where there was two of his family dead, and where there was ten armed men waiting for him; and when he come along the ten got a little mite afraid, because he was so brave. They locked and bolted the door of that room, and then they waited, and Hugh Torridon busted down that door the way a bull would bust down a pasture gate.

"He come in and they let off all their rifles, and they shot Torridon with six bullets through the body and the legs. But he went on and got hold on one of them, and that was Jim Brett, and he strangled Jim Brett as he died."

"What a glorious man he must have been!" cried the boy.

"He was a great Torridon," nodding,

she agreed, "only that he didn't have the brains of his pa. But after he'd killed Jim the rest of the Bretts got a little mite angry, and they went through the house and they killed every one. There was only one boy left that had been knocked on the head and fell like dead.

"When they had cooled off a little and counted the eight dead bodies, then they begun to think of starting home, and just then the boy that had seemed to be senseless, he got up on his feet and began staggering around.

"They'd cooled off, as I was sayin', so that they didn't have the heart to finish him. They just let him live, and Uncle John, he had a pretty good idea, because he said: 'I'll take him home and raise him up, and we'll make a man of him, in Jim's place!'"

She paused.

"Took him home!" echoed poor Torridon. "Took him here! Aunt Ellen, have you been telling me the story of my grandfather, and my father and mother?"

"I have!" she said. She added: "And your baby brother, and your two sisters, and your cousin who——"

"Don't!" whispered the boy. "It hurts me terribly! Ah, Aunt Ellen, but I had to know!"

"Of course you did, honey!"

She raised the lantern so that it shone into the eyes of the captive, but in so doing, she allowed it to fall, unawares, upon her own eyes, and Torridon was amazed to see that she was grinning with toothless, wicked malice.

Then he could understand! It was all a device of her ancient hatred. She had wanted to sit by his side and watch him while she opened wounds of which he never had dreamed. This was her fiendish pleasure, and now she stood up.

"I dunno what else I can do for you, sonny. My stories don't seem to rest you none."

"Only leave me!" said he.

"Then lie and think," said she, thrusting her wicked face closer to his. "You lie and think about the good day that's comin' before you, and you eat plenty of good meat and keep yourself fat and strong, because you'll need all of your strength when they take you out and tie you to a tree, my son!"

She turned from him, shuffling away with the lantern. It cast vast shadows that swung up against the ceiling and then down and out before her. It made the room seem awash.

Then she was gone, and the cellar door was closed with a heavy, smashing sound.

The ears of the captive must have been attuned by sorrow, for he could hear the voice of Will Brett saying calmly: "You spent a long time down there!"

"My business couldn't be done quick," she replied. "Gimme your arm into the house, Billy dear!"

After that the long silence began once more and ran on into the morning. Yet Paul did not grow irritated by the blank time. His thoughts ran before him like a rapidly flowing river. He was seeing all the past of his race. Before that the name of Torridon had had no content to him. The malice of Aunt Ellen with her recital of horrors had given him a history and his people a past. He was almost grateful to her for the torture of that story.

CHAPTER XV.

A SOFT VOICE CALLS.

TEN days of blackness, utter blackness, passed.

He was fed once a day. He was shifted into a corner room of the cellar. There it was damper, wetter. Twice during the ten days heavy rains came, and the water covered the floor on which he lay.

He wondered profoundly why he did not sicken and die. But he had not so

much as a cold in the head. It was not disease that troubled him. It was the constant misery of the wet, the dirt, the darkness, the scampering of rats, which repeatedly crossed his hands and face. And once, stretching out his hand at a noise, he passed his fingers along the sliding back of a snake.

So ten days passed.

Then he was visited by John Brett in person. The old leader threw the door back and came heavily down the stairs. He pushed his lantern into the face of the captive and leaned above him.

"Are you awake?"

"I'm awake," said the boy.

"I've brought news for you."

"Yes?" he answered calmly, for he had given up hope.

"We offered you in exchange for Joe. But they say they don't believe that we've got a real Torridon. No real Torridon would've lived twelve years with the Bretts."

He paused to allow this information to sink in.

"They won't give up Joe Brett for you," he concluded. "So you see what they done for you? We gotta kill you, my boy. Duty to do it. Only it's night, now. We gotta wait for the morning to have light to see the show. So long, Paul! I hope you keep your head up high in the mornin', the way that a Torridon should!"

He turned away. At the door he paused and threw over his shoulder:

"She's been here beggin' for you, draggin' herself at my knees, weepin' and cryin' for you. But though you might be able to make a fool out of the Brett women, you ain't gunna make a fool out of me through their talk!"

He slammed the door, turned the key with a screech in the rusty bolt, and then stamped away.

Paul Torridon was almost glad that waiting was over. It was not death, but the manner of it that was terrible. But at least he could depend on good old Jack. Jack Brett would never see him suffer, but would drive a bullet cheerfully through his heart, and so the merciful end!

The wind came up. He heard its distant whining and moaning. And the rain drove against the house in rattling gusts. By fits and starts, the squalls of that storm rushed against the house, and Torridon was glad of the storm, too, because it would help to fill the long hours of the night. He hoped that it would rave and scream in the morning, too, when he was led out to die. For he had only that one grim hope left—that he might find the strength to die with a smile on his lips, as a brave man should. He even hoped that, before the end, he could be able to find a speech of sharp defiance, and taunting, so that the memory of how he had died might have a noble place in the mind of Nancy, since that was all that he could leave to her!

A leak had sprung somewhere in the very center of the cellar. A quick, sharp rattling fall seemed to come at his very door. The wind howled far off; another gust of rain smashed on the house and again he could hear that clatter at his door.

And then, was it not the faint, harsh murmur of the hinges, slowly turned?

He braced himself. There was such a thing as a midnight murder to defeat the hand of justice, which was beginning to be extended more and more often into this region where the gun had been the only judge.

Then a soft voice called: "Paul Torridon!" A man's voice; quiet, pitched just with the fall of the rain.

He said loudly: "Here I am! If you've come to murder me, strike a light. I want to see your face."

Something crouched beside him. His body turned to rigid steel.

"Torridon, I'm Roger Lincoln!"

That name dissolved the world and left the blackness and the cold and the

dark of despair far off, and brought the prisoner suddenly into the light of warm hope and comfort.

Roger Lincoln!

The ropes were cut away from his hands, from his feet. He tried to rise, but Lincoln thrust him back again. There was wonderful power in the famous hand of that hero.

"Lie still. Close your eyes. Breathe deeply, and relax!"

He obeyed those quick orders with perfect attention.

And then the strong hands began to move, rubbing his numbed muscles, bringing sense and power into his nerves, into his whole body. Paul began to tingle, where the ropes had long worn at the flesh, until the tingling made him almost cry out.

"Now," said Roger Lincoln, ceasing from his labor. "Now, try your feet."

Paul stood up in the dark.

He found himself ridiculously weak. His head went round. He would have fallen, but the other clutched and steadied him.

"This is bad," he heard Lincoln mutter. "This is very bad!"

He paused, breathing hard from the work of that rubbing. Then he said: "I've brought an extra pistol. Can you use a pistol at all?"

"Yes."

"Here it is. Double-barreled. It shoots straight and it's not too heavy. Never fire till I give the word, and I won't give the word unless it's the last chance. And——"

"Hush!" said Paul Torridon.

He had lain those endless hours in the place until his ear could make out everything, everywhere in the cellar.

Some one had raised the cellar door; the big, flat, massive door.

Outside that was always at least one guard. John Brett took no chances.

"How did you come in?" whispered Paul.

"Through the door," said Roger Lincoln. "The hail knocked them silly a little while ago. Then I went in when they hunted cover. They're tired of their work."

"They know that you're here!" said Torridon in an agony of conviction.

"How can they?"

"They're opening the cellar door now."

"Follow me; straight behind me, if you can."

"I can, I think. If you go slowly, slowly!"

He concentrated. He fought his reeling head, his clumsy, weak limbs, and made them go straight. So he marched ahead. They were through the door of the cell which had held him, and then a suddenly unhooded lantern flamed against their eyes. And behind the lantern light they saw the dim silhouettes of four men, guns in hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON TO THE WEST!

LONG afterward, when he thought of that moment, Torridon went cold with fear and horror; but at the moment, overriding all else, was the knowledge that he had only two bullets in that double-barreled pistol, that he had nothing wherewith to load again, and that each of those two bullets must bring down a man.

At the gleam of the lantern he had stumbled and fallen flat as its rays swept over them. Roger Lincoln had leaped to the side with catlike suddenness. And three guns boomed and flashed from the hands of the Bretts—three rapid, long flashes which lighted up the dark of the cellar.

At the left-hand and last flash, Torridon fired his right barrel. And he heard the slump of a body to the floor. He had fired just beneath the flash—his bullet should have found the body; perhaps the heart.

He remembered, afterward, how he

had thought out those details. Roger Lincoln had fired two shots to his right.

Then a vague form loomed above Torridon and hurled itself at him with a sound like the growl of an infuriated dog. Up at the head of the lunging shadow he fired. A heavy weight struck him, rolled loosely off. And he got to his hands and knees just as Roger Lincoln leaned above him.

"Are you hurt?"

"Not hurt, Roger!"

"Thank goodness!"

To make speed, Roger Lincoln caught up the youngster and heaved him over one shoulder. He rushed up the steps, with a sound of stifled groaning following him from the cellar. Two shots followed them. One bullet landed with a soft thud. Torridon was sure that it must have struck the flesh of his rescuer, but Roger Lincoln went on, unhesitating.

The door of the cellar was cast wide.

Out from the house rushed half a dozen forms, armed, shouting with excitement.

"What's happening? Who's there? Stop those two men!" shouted the voice of John Brett. "Where's a lantern?"

There was no lantern. Through the dusk, Torridon thought they might escape, but Roger Lincoln did not attempt to avoid the group. Instead, he strode on straight toward them, straight through them.

"It's Roger Lincoln!" he called. "He's down there with Torridon. He's broken into the place—he's killed Charlie, I think. And we downed one of 'em——"

"Roger Lincoln!" cried John Brett.

And all of them rushed like bulldogs toward the point of danger. Several others swarmed down from the house. The door was swinging and crashing.

Then they turned the corner, and Roger Lincoln lowered Torridon to the ground.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"No," said Torridon.

"Come on with me then. My horse is near here."

They began to run, and no sooner did the strain of the muscles begin than Torridon felt a long, burning pain that went through his body and up his side.

"The gray can carry you—I'll run alongside," said Roger Lincoln. "I started with a second horse; it went dead lame. I couldn't wait till to-morrow——"

"I would have been dead to-morrow," gasped Torridon.

They broke through a group of trees.

"I'll get Ashur!"

"Aye, if we could get him!"

"They're after us!" cried Lincoln.

A wave of angry shouting broke upward from the cellar door and spread abroad into the night.

"I'm going to take the gray mare," said Roger Lincoln. "I'll ride across them and get them after me if I can. You go on to the barn and get Ashur. Do you want to try that?"

"I'll try that!"

They had reached the covert in which Comanche was hidden, and now Roger Lincoln flashed away on her; and Torridon ran for his life toward the stable.

He could feel the wound throbbing down his side now. It sent electric thrills of fear through him. What would happen to him? How far would his life last?

He climbed the last fence. He was through the rear stable door and Ashur's whinny of greeting met him in the dark. And here was Ashur, plunging, snorting with joy, like a dog long separated from a loved master.

In all his life, Ashur never had failed to see young Torridon every day. Now he was frantic with pleasure. And nothing Torridon called in the way of softly muttered orders had any effect on him.

He pitched off the saddle when it was dragged onto his back. Only when

the bridle and bit had been given to him did he quiet, and then, from the distance, Torridon heard voices.

And there was left to him only Ashur, and an unloaded pistol.

Frantically he caught up the saddle and dragged it over the back of the stallion again. The cinches swung readily into his hand, and he jerked them home on the buckles.

"Who's there?" some one was calling. Lantern light began to turn the stall posts into a myriad tall shadows, pitching to and fro like waves before a gale.

"It's some one at Ashur! Quick, it may be him!"

Clearly, clearly rang that voice, freezing the heart of Torridon. No Brett could miss a target fairly seen. Only the night, which had covered him before, might cover him now!

He climbed into the saddle. He had a certain nervous force in his hands. With that, he dragged his trembling, failing body. The light was rushing down upon him, like a ship driving through a sea. There were more than two. Three men were coming, and may Heaven defend him!

He twisted Ashur from the stall. The stallion heard his whisper. Like a human being, aware of danger, it slipped forward with stealthy steps, and the rear door of the stable was just before them, swinging half shut in the wind.

And then the full tide of the lantern light washed over them.

"There he is!"

"Shoot!"

"Shoot for the horse! Anything to get him!"

Then Paul called: "Ashur!"

And Ashur leaped for the half-shut door, with Torridon bending along his neck. It was too narrow a space for horse and man to go through, but Ashur turned his head and, like a man, gave the door his shoulder—gave it such a blow that it crashed open under the shock.

Three guns filled the barn with thunder. Horses, frightened, began to neigh and stamp, and Torridon was out under the wet skies. Noise everywhere, from the house, from the stable!

Had the stallion been struck?

There was no way to tell at once. His great heart would not fail until his blood ran out. And he would tell time like an hourglass to the last running of the sand.

Torridon turned the black toward the road. Three fences, big, black, shaggy with the night, rose before them. Strangely large they loomed, but Ashur went over them softly, lightly. Surely he was not struck! But what if he were laying down his life for his master? Was the life of any man worth such a price?

They gained the road before the house. Other horsemen were pouring out from the door of the barn behind him. But there, glimmering through the dark before him, he saw a horseman —Roger Lincoln on his gray?

He shouted, and the ringing voice of Roger Lincoln struck back to him. Then he was with that hero from the plains! And the pursuit was beating behind them.

Let them come! Let them ride the hearts out of their horses; they would no more catch this pair than they would catch the eagles in the air with their bare hands!

Swiftly they slid away. Like quicksilver flowed the mare. Like the wind ran the black. For a blinding mile they ran, and then the silver mare slipped behind. A neck back, a length back!

"Steady!" called Roger Lincoln. "You'll fly away from me, lad!"

Torridon drew in the stallion. They ran more easily, with long bounds that devoured the distance. There was not even a sound of pursuit, now, behind them.

At moonrise they stopped.

Then they looked to the horses. Ashur was untouched.

"And you?" said Roger Lincoln.

"I'm scratched along the side, I think."

It was only a scratch, a glancing cut which might have taken his life, if it had been a fraction of an inch deeper.

Lincoln bound it up.

"Now what?" he asked.

"I must go to the right, down the next road. I—I have to see a girl, if I can, before I ride on, Roger."

"That's pretty Nancy?"

"Do you know about her?"

"Every one knows about her and you. Jack told me."

"Jack?"

"She gave Jack my ring that you'd given her. It was Jack that found me and sent me back."

"Bless him! But——"

"She's not in her father's house. She's been sent away to the West—to the house of a cousin."

"Then West, West!" said Torridon feverishly. "How far will it be?"

"Ten days of careful riding," said Roger Lincoln. "Into a new world, lad."

"And can we find her?" Torridon persisted.

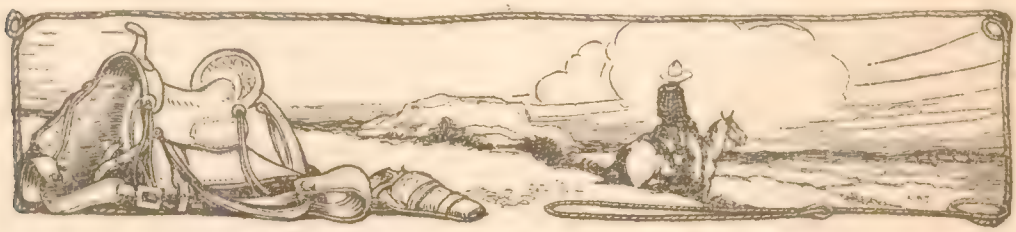
"Of course we can find her," came the great man's answer.

"West, then," said Torridon, "if you'll take me."

"Look to Ashur," said the plainsman. "Will he fail you?"

"Never."

"He is only a horse," said Roger Lincoln, "and I'll hope to show you that I'm a man, Torridon!"

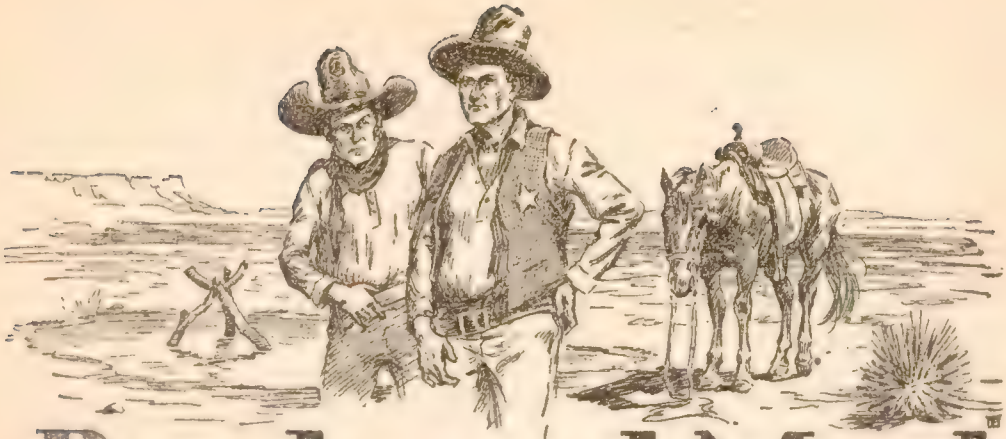


TEXAS ROSES GOING TO WASTE

IN addition to its other resources and attractions, Texas has the unique charm of millions of roses that annually go to waste because there is no market for them. So the establishment of a perfume factory at Tyler, Texas, to utilize the wasted blossoms from the great Smith County rose fields has been urged by W. R. Hudnall, a nurseryman.

Smith County is one of the greatest rose-growing sections of the Southwest. Within a few miles of Tyler are many acres of growing rose plants which farmers cultivate with implements much as they would corn or potatoes. Harvesting of the plants is done on a wholesale basis, since a machine has been invented which is drawn along the rose rows, digging into the earth and loosening the plants, which can then be pulled up.

During the rose-growing season last year—that is, from the first of April to the first of December—more than seven hundred and fifty thousand plants were shipped. In spite of the superabundance of blossoms, visitors to the rose fields are discouraged, since they often damage the plants in their attempts to gather huge armloads of flowers. During the blooming season the countryside is a scene of wonderful beauty. But, until the establishment of the perfume factory, roses that would sell for five dollars a dozen in the cities will continue to go to waste. The roses, at present, are left to be destroyed in the hot sun, blown away by the wind, or even piled up at the side of the fields as rubbish.



Bad and Mad

by W.C. Tuttle

Author of "Dangling Doom," etc.

"YOU better put yore hands up, pardner."

The man on his knees at the water hole turned his head slowly and looked at the other man, who was covering him with a rifle. This second man had popped up like a Jack-in-a-box from behind a sandstone boulder. Near the water hole stood a dejected-looking bay horse, head hanging, one hing leg cocked listlessly.

The man at the water hole got slowly to his feet, keeping his hands above his waist. He squinted closely at the other man, his eyes puzzled. Then, with momentarily sagging jaw, he uttered an expression of astonishment.

"Ben!" he exclaimed. "Well, what won't yuh see when yuh ain't got no gun!"

It was a sarcastic expression, because the speaker had a heavy gun in the holster at his right thigh. The other man came closer, but did not lower the muzzle of his weapon. The sun glinted from a badge fastened on the lapel of his vest.

They were as alike as two peas, these two. Both smooth shaven, slightly grizzled, neither of them carrying an ounce of surplus weight. Even their clothes were pretty much the same.

"Well, I'll be darned!" snorted the man with the rifle. "Harry!"

They stood for a while, looking at each other. Then:

"Oh, would some power the giftie give us, to see ourselves as others see us," misquoted the empty-handed man, and then added quickly, "if it would do any good."

"Set down," said the sheriff, indicating a boulder. "But keep yore hands in sight. I don't trust you no more than I ever did."

"You allus was a lovin' brother," grinned the other. "I've heard that twins have queer affections for each other—and it's right. You might lower that cannon, Ben. I know when I'm stopped."

"You robbed the bank in Oro City, yuh know."

"Thasso? How long have you been in this country, anyway?"

"What's that got to do with robbin' a bank?"

"Nothin'. Must have been here quite a while. They don't elect a sheriff in this country until they know something about him."

"I've been here seven years," said the sheriff gruffly. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, around up in the northwest."

"Stealin' horses?"

"That's none of yore business; and if yuh wasn't my twin brother, I wouldn't be that civil."

"Why didn't yuh go straight, Harry?"

"Aw, don't start preachin'! Slip the bracelets on me and take me back to yore jail. Heredity's what ails me, I suppose."

The sheriff smiled grimly. "Heredity! Why didn't it affect me?"

"Don't pull that holier-than-thou, Bennie."

"Don't like to hear about yore sins, eh? Well, it shore is funny to have you pullin' a job in my county. Makes it bad for me, don'tcha know it? I can't let yuh go, and it'll shore reflect on me if I take yuh back. Anybody'd know you was my twin brother."

"Yeah, we do look alike. Everybody used to say that I looked more like you than you do yourself. How far are we from Oro City? I shore traveled in a circle."

"It's only three miles, due south of here."

"Thasso? Yo're thought pretty well of down there, ain't yuh?"

"I'm the sheriff."

"You would be! I 'member you was allus bossin' things when we was kids. Yo're a right big man, I take it."

"I have somethin' to say about things in Oro City."

"You ain't married, I imagine."

A peculiar expression flashed across the sheriff's face.

"No, I ain't married."

"That's queer. You allus was kinda shineful around the wimmin'."

"Where's the money yuh got from the bank?"

The other grinned slowly.

"That's what a lawyer would call a leadin' question."

"Don't be a fool, Harry. I'll make yuh a trade."

"Eh? A trade?"

"Give me that money, and I turn yuh loose."

"Yea-a-ah? On the square?"

"I don't want to take yuh back. If the bank gets its money, they won't howl very loud. I can say I made yuh drop it but that yuh got away on me."

"Brotherly love, eh?"

"Love be dashed! I'd look well takin' my own brother to jail."

"Uh-huh! But suppose I won't tell yuh where it is?"

"Oh, yes, you will! I'll rope yuh tight and leave yuh out there in the rocks for a few days. Nobody ever comes by here; it's out of the beaten trail."

"And then you'll trade me water for information, eh?"

"Yeah—and you'll trade."

The robber threw back his head and began laughing. It seemed to strike him as a huge joke and he shook with merriment. The muzzle of the sheriff's rifle had been lowered perceptibly and his left hand rubbed his stubbled chin wonderingly.

"Trade me water for information! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The robber threw back his head and slapped himself on the thigh. It was evidently the biggest joke he had ever heard. Again he roared his mirth, slapped his thigh heavily, and when his hand came up again it was comfortably filled with the butt of a Colt .45, and the muzzle was covering the sheriff.

The man had jerked forward off the rock, head hunched between his shoulders, his eyes glittering. For several

moments the sheriff stared at him, realizing what a fool he had been not to take that gun away when he had the chance, and then let his rifle slide to the sand.

"I've done bought out yore tradin' establishment," growled the robber slowly. "Now, you'll trade on my terms."

"I was givin' you the best of the trade," said the sheriff. "What's a few dollars to years in prison?"

"It's jist accordin' to how bad yuh need money. Back away from that rifle, Bennie. Hands up to the shoulders! Oh, shore, I'll take yore six-gun! We may be twin brothers, but we're not twin fools. That's yore part of the heredity."

"What are you goin' to trade with me?"

The sheriff was sullen now, as he measured his brother.

"Trade? I'll tell yuh what I'll trade —me for you? Get what I mean? No? Then here's the idea; I'll be the sheriff, and you lie out here in these hot rocks. I've allus wanted to have a chance to boss things a little m'self. You've been sheriff for so long that it won't hurt yuh to let yore brother handle the job for a few hours or days; it's all accordin' to how yuh stand the heat. I'll come out to-morrow and give yuh feed and water. I can alibi that by the fact that I'm lookin' for the man you *didn't* find.

"Yeah, that's what I said! I never robbed yore bank; never was in Oro City in my life. You trailed the wrong man. I've dodged sheriffs from Laredo to Vancouver, but yo're the first one ever to put the deadwood on me—and for somethin' I never done! But I'm through dodgin' for a while, at least as long as I can keep you under cover.

"I'll jist go down to Oro City and be the sheriff for a while, and what I want you to do right now is to tell me a few things."

"Tell yuh a few things?" parroted the sheriff.

"Yeah. What's the name of yore deputy?"

An expression of animal cunning flashed across the sheriff's face.

"Find out for yourself," he said.

"Meanin' that you won't come through with any information, eh?"

"I'm not tellin' what I know."

"Do yuh think that'll stop me?" The speaker laughed shortly. "I've brought contraband from Mexico under the noses of the rangers, and I've had mounties ride with me on a wagon load of hooch into Alberta. I've run, when the runnin' was good, and I've shot my way through, when it was blocked. I've preached in Seattle and dealt faro in Reno.

"I've lived on my nerve, Bennie; and I'll keep on livin' on my nerve. Yore little penny-ante town don't scare me. I'll go down there and be the sheriff. I'm glad yuh said that few people ever come out here. You'll stay here, while I play sheriff, and after a few days I'll crack that bank for every cent she's got, and then I'll turn you loose."

"You goin' to take my star and my guns?"

"I shore am. C'mon over to my horse while I get a rope."

"Yo're crazy."

The sheriff shuffled ahead and stood there dumbly, while the other man shook out a lariat.

"I'll have to turn my horse loose," he told the sheriff. "I'll cache the saddle and bridle. Whew! that sun is hot. It's a wonder it don't drive all you folks crazy down here. It's a cinch I won't stay here very long, but I'll go away with more than I brought. So yo're a big man in this county, eh? I've never had a chance to be a big man. Mebbe I'll go straight, Ben. It all depends on how you stand the heat out here in the rocks. With you out of the way, I might play a straight game."

"Yo're crazy," said the sheriff in a dull voice.

"Crazy? Ha, ha, ha, ha! Not me, Bennie. Yo're crazy, if you think I am."

"Are you goin' to tie me up?"

"Y'betcha."

The sheriff was standing there dumbly, hands hanging at his sides, while his brother examined the rope. They were several feet apart. Suddenly, without any warning, the sheriff sprang at his brother, the swift leap of a wild cat, slashing as he did so with both hands.

It was so unexpected that the man had no chance to guard himself, except to throw up both hands with the rope, staggering back in the yielding sand. A slashing fist barely missed his jaw, but struck across his throat, cutting off his breath. Another fist banged against his ear, and then they went down in a heap, clawing, striking, gouging.

There were no rules in this fight. Like two animals, battling to the death, they rolled in the sand, fighting with fists, elbows, knees; berserk creatures of the desert they were, fighting to the finish. There was no conversation, only grunting, choking, panting noises as they fought.

Rolling over and over, they went surging to their knees, only to go down again; digging their feet into the sand, growling, whimpering. Suddenly they fell apart and stumbled to their feet. Without a pause, the sheriff lowered his head and dived for the other, who was clawing at his holster for the gun which had been lost early in the fight. It was out there, shining on the sand, but there was no time to get it now.

Down they went again, but fell apart and got to their feet. Once more the sheriff charged swiftly, but this time the other man was not trying for his gun. The sheriff was coming in low, like a football tackler, and the other man met his charge, jerking up one knee as they crashed together. But the sheriff's clutching hands went limp, as the knee caught him beneath the chin, and he flopped sidewise in the sand, his head twisted at a queer angle.

The other man slumped down in the sand, his head hanging, as he tried to pump air into his tortured lungs. His eyes were filled with perspiration and sand, his nose and mouth bleeding. He looked at the sheriff, blinking foolishly. Then he crawled to the water hole and stretched for a drink. The water was warm, bitter to the taste, but he drank heavily. He washed his face and hands, which dried immediately, and then he rolled a cigarette.

There was no remorse for what he had done. He looked at the inert figure on the sand indifferently. It had been fifteen years since he had seen Ben, and then only for a few days. Their paths had always been far apart. He snapped the cigarette aside and got to his feet. With callous indifference he changed clothes with the dead sheriff.

Then he loaded the body on his horse and took it far back into a little canyon, where he hid it among the rocks. The saddle and bridle he also hid away in a deep crevice, and turned the horse loose to shift for itself.

Back he went to the water hole, where he proceeded to wipe out all evidences of a fight. With a mesquite branch he smoothed the sand, knowing that the first breeze would finish the job. He threw his own gun off among the rocks, shoved his belt beneath a mesquite bush, and put on the sheriff's belt.

Picking up the sheriff's rifle and revolver, he went down to where the dead man's horse was tied to a juniper, and climbed into the saddle. He knew he was playing a risky game, but he was banking entirely on his physical appearance. He had bluffed and stalled his way through life and knew his own ability. For six months, at one time, he had acted as a deputy sheriff in a

New Mexico county, which gave him an insight into a sheriff's duties. He remembered that Ben had always been a man of few words, and he intended to keep his mouth shut until he had found out a few things.

It was not difficult for him to find Oro City. It was larger than he had thought. He didn't know where his office was located, and his eyes searched the main street for the court house or a sign which might direct him. He glanced keenly at the bank, as he rode past, and it seemed to be doing business.

"I reckon it didn't get nicked very hard," he told himself. "Just wait'll I get a whack at it!"

A cowboy stopped on the edge of the sidewalk and looked closely at him. The sheriff half waved at the cowboy, who shoved his hands deeply in his pockets and watched him go on down the street.

"Evidently not a friend of mine," the other observed dryly. "I've got to be careful until I get the lay of this thing, 'cause I might make a bad break."

Ah, there it is! Just a little further down the street was the sign:

SHERIFF'S OFFICE.

The newcomer smiled grimly. A man was standing in the doorway, but now he turned and stepped back into the office. Boldly, the sheriff dismounted at the little hitch rack, slapped the dust off his sombrero, and walked into the office. His eyes were not very keen, after coming in out of the bright sunlight, and he didn't realize what was happening, except that one man had landed on his back, while two more had grappled him from in front, whirling him sidewise into the wall.

He had no chance to fight back. His arms were twisted behind him, and the handcuffs clicked tightly around his wrists.

"That'll hold him!" panted one of the men.

"Not for mine," protested another. "Soak him in a cell before anybody finds out he's here."

"Good idea! C'mon."

They hustled him through the office, down a corridor to a cell, where they locked him in, still handcuffed. He stared blankly at them—his mind whirling. What was it all about, he wondered?

Another man came in—the cowboy who had stood on the edge of the sidewalk.

"Wasn't that Ben Allen?" he asked.

"It shore was," growled one of the men, who wore a deputy's badge.

"What did the fool come back here for?"

"Quién sabe, Jim? I reckon the jury was right when they judged him crazy. He argued with them that he was sheriff of this county. Bob was to take him to the asylum yesterday, yuh know, but somehow he got Bob's gun away, shot him twice, and made a getaway with Bob's star, rifle, and six-gun."

"And then the danged fool came back!"

"Merely provin' that he *is* crazy."

They moved down the corridor, and the prisoner came up to the bars, his eyes wide, jaw sagging. For a long time he stared into space, licking his dry lips with a drier tongue. Then he rested his hot forehead against the cool metal of the bars.

"Yessir," he said bitterly. "It's the first time in my life I ever agreed with a deputy sheriff. Solomon, in all his wisdom, never made a wiser statement."

Three on the Trail

By Max Brand

Author of "The Path to Plunder," etc.

JAMES GERALDI, known as "Slim Jim," incurs the displeasure of the hotel keeper, Chalmers, on two counts. Geraldi hastily escapes via the roof, entering another house in the same manner.

A beautiful girl, Louise Asprey, shelters him, asks some searching questions, and intimates that Geraldi might help her in a difficulty.

Mrs. Asprey, bejeweled and excited, is introduced to her daughter's guest, and in turn calls for "Cousin Edgar." The two men are instantly mutually suspicious. Asprey insists that Geraldi stay for dinner, and in his study tells of hunting exploits in India, ending with a hint at a large reward to one who would put a man out of his way. Geraldi refuses the bait. At dinner Edgar betrays some knowledge of locks, Geraldi having spoken of taking lessons in the art from a locksmith while in jail. Afterward Asprey again angles, and Geraldi bluntly refuses to kill at any price.

CHAPTER IX.

WANTED, A KILLER.

COUSIN EDGAR, at this second rebuff, spread out both hands.

"My poor friend!" said he. "How desperate he is!"

"Look here," said Geraldi bluntly. "If you want a killer, it isn't hard to find them. And in this town. Chalmers' hotel is full of them."

"Bullies and stupid brutes!" said Cousin Edgar, some of the richness leaving his tones and a ring of metal coming into them.

"Dick Renney isn't a brute or a bully," said Geraldi. "He ought to suit you."

"Renney? Renney? Is he there?"

"He's expected, I think."

"Ah!" said Cousin Edgar.

He made no effort to conceal his satisfaction, and Geraldi wondered that the big man should show so little tact. Unless, indeed, it really was the business of another man which he was transacting as an agent. A foul business, at any rate! But it was not the first time that men had lowered the bars to Geraldi and showed him glimpses of the devil inside. They felt that they spoke to a blood brother in the trade; they could not realize that to him crime was a fine art.

They passed on into the library. Mrs. Asprey took up some needle-point; Louise was watching the fire, chin in hand; Cousin Edgar paced up and down through the shadows. Presently he excused himself. He would be back in a few minutes.

And, as he left, Geraldi wondered if the errand might take him to Chalmer's hotel in search of Dick Renney. In sooth, stranger things than this had been!

They would make an admirable partnership, thought Geraldi. Cousin Edgar, bland and smooth, and Dick Renney all fire—a very ferret in his love of blood.

Louise Asprey suddenly raised her head and glanced across at him; then he saw that her mother was asleep above the needle-point. She made a furtive gesture. Geraldi rose at once and retreated to a chair nearer to the door, and there, presently, she followed him.

She did not whisper, but her voice was wonderfully guarded and soft.

"It's almost too lucky," said she. "Cousin Edgar gone and mother asleep! I have to talk to you!"

"Are you sure that your mother is asleep?"

"She isn't capable of deception," said the girl frankly. "In the first place, Cousin Edgar wants you to do something for him?"

"I've refused."

"Ah—I wish that you'd simply put him off. You can't tell me what it was?"

"He spoke to me in confidence."

She looked curiously at Geraldi, wondering at the broad streak of inviolable honor in this professional, this confessed criminal.

"I started to talk to you this afternoon."

"Yes," said Geraldi. "I hoped to hear the rest of it."

"It's easier for me to talk, now," said the girl. "Otherwise, the story would seem too strange! But, to begin with, I must tell you that though my father is not here, he's not dead. At least, we have no proof that he's dead. And recently I had a suspicion that he must be alive!"

Geraldi waited.

"I have to talk very frankly to you, or else not at all."

He nodded.

"Now, then, there's always been a wild streak in the Asprey blood. I have to tell you that to explain my father. There never was a kinder man. He was clever, too, in business. He grew quite rich. Then some of his investments turned out badly. We became almost poor. Father used to worry about it, and the worry brought out that wild streak I was speaking of. He began to gamble to make up for losses. Honest gambling, but for high stakes. And that gambling, of course, cost him still more money. Then one day he had a brawl with a professional gambler. I think that the man had done something dishonest with the cards. My father killed him!"

Geraldi leaned forward a little in his chair. He was not greatly surprised by the news.

"That was five years ago. At the trial, a number of father's enemies—he was an outspoken man who made more enemies than friends, I'm afraid—his enemies used all their influence against him. I think that he would have been acquitted, but in the middle of the trial he grew nervous, escaped from jail, and since then we've never seen him. His guilt was taken for granted when he ran away. He's an outlawed man.

"That's only the first part of the story.

"Then our affairs began to grow better. There were two or three investments of father's—one was in a Mexican silver mine, in Chihuahua—which began to pay richly. We grew very

prosperous, but there was never a word from father.

"Then Cousin Edgar arrived. We never had known him very well. He'd been a great wanderer, you must understand. You've seen his hunting trophies? Mother told him her troubles. He was very sympathetic. He's as strong and hard as steel, but he can seem as soft as a baby. He was so sympathetic and understanding that mother began to ask him for advice. She begged him to stay on with us. In a single month he had all our business running through his hands. And he's never left us from that day to this. All the accounts, all the investments in stocks and bonds—everything goes through Cousin Edgar. You understand?"

"I understand perfectly," said Geraldi.

"I think he's very intelligent about business. I don't doubt that he's invested all the money well. But I can't help wondering if he's working more for himself than for us. Because—I have to tell you even this—he wants to marry mother, and last week she promised that she would, if we had no word from father before the month is out."

Geraldi drew in a long breath. He had guessed at this. But, nevertheless, his anger grew as he listened.

"The governor came through the town the next day after they reached that agreement. I went to see him. He talked over my father's case with me. He was very kind. He told me that he was sure it had been an entirely excusable killing, if a shooting affair ever is excusable. He said that if my father would come and talk to him as I had done, he had no doubt that a pardon could be arranged. When I came home I found that Cousin Edgar was in a great state of excitement. He can control everything except the pink spots in his cheeks. And they were flaming. He always had been *too* kind to me before. Suddenly he began to be as hard as steel. He let me see that he detested me. And I'm sure that it was because he knew of my talk with the governor."

"Naturally. He didn't want your father to have the least chance to come back."

"Of course not! If father should return—then, who can tell? It might be found that Cousin Edgar's accounts are not so perfectly straight as they should be. If my father does *not* return, then everything goes directly into the hands of Cousin Edgar. And in one week after the marriage, I'm sure that everything would be so arranged that, even if my father did come back, there would be very little for him to get his hands on. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Now, the excitement of Edgar was too great. After a five-years' absence one would take it for granted that a man was dead. Edgar was so worked up that I'm fairly sure he knows my father is alive, and *where* he is! And now I'm living in terrible fear lest he should—should—I don't dare to say what I'm afraid of!"

But Geraldi could not help putting two and two together. The killing which Cousin Edgar would pay for so richly!

"I needed," went on the girl, "a brave, keen, clever man who would try to unravel the clues and find my father. The law couldn't help me. But——"

She hesitated.

"Some one on the other side of the fence would have a better chance," he helped her. "And I entirely agree with you. You'll have to tell me something more about him, though. His habits, and such things."

"I'll describe him. He isn't very big—but he looks big. His face has a battered appearance. He looks as if he'd been through a good many storms.

And he has—of his own making! He always loved excitement and danger. He's fearless. Sometimes I'm afraid he's almost fierce. But there's nothing faithless, treacherous, or cruel about him. I know him and I love him! So would you! Would you try to find such a man for me?"

"Would I try? I'd give worlds to find him," said the frigate bird with sudden enthusiasm. "I would——"

He broke off and laid a finger on his lips. Then, gliding to the door just behind them, he turned the knob swiftly, silently, and jerked the door open. The form of Cousin Edgar was revealed against the shadows of the hallway!

CHAPTER X.

IRON CREATURES.

COUSIN EDGAR advanced at once. "Ah, thank you, thank you!" he said genially to Geraldi. "B-r-r-r! It's turned chilly out! We have our breaths of wind from the snows, you understand! But then, you're familiar with the climate here? One always must be on the watch for sudden changes. This climate requires a philosopher. A stoic, I should say!"

He came into the room on the current of his own conversation, softened at once when he saw Mrs. Asprey asleep.

"Poor soul! Time tells! Time tells!" said Cousin Edgar gently.

Geraldi neither moved nor spoke; but the girl followed Cousin Edgar to the fireplace and looked at him with stony eyes.

"Did you walk far, Cousin Edgar?" she asked.

"Around and about," he said, "around and about. There is nothing so good as a little walk after dinner. But that's an old-fashioned custom, and you youngsters—iron creatures!—can do without it."

He smiled on them, tolerantly, his rich voice a murmur of envy.

"I must go," said Geraldi. "It's well after dark. You've all been very kind to me. I don't want to waken Mrs. Asprey. Will you give her my thanks?"

"Ah, but wait," said Cousin Edgar. "I have something in my room for you. Wait here a moment, Mr. Geraldi. It may take a moment or two. I'll have to rummage through a trunk."

"Thank you," said Geraldi, and Cousin Edgar left the room.

They heard his footstep in the hall, on the stairs, creaking higher and higher. Geraldi beckoned to the girl.

"That's a fake," said he.

"Of course it is," she answered hotly. "He was listening at the door. After this, it's simply war!"

"Come with me," said Geraldi. "I'm going to show you something."

He stepped into the hall with her. It was very dark just outside the library door, and at one side stood a wide-spreading palm. Behind this he drew the girl. "Now, don't make a sound," he whispered at her ear, and she nodded.

In fact, they heard nothing. It was only a shadow that loomed suddenly before them, and then the silhouette of Asprey turned the corner at the bottom of the stairs and hurried to the front door. He opened it swiftly, and yet without the slightest noise, and he closed it again behind him in equal silence. There was no noise of a footfall on the stairs outside.

"He had to go outside and get his present for me, you see," said Geraldi. "I thought he would!"

"He never left the house after dinner," said the girl, through her teeth. "Did you notice? There was no dust at all—even on the heels of his shoes!"

"You should be a detective," smiled Geraldi. "I must go, or else he'll come

back with the present. Have you any marching orders for me?"

"I haven't," said the girl.

"Have you any hint where he may be? This United States is a fairly large place to start a blind hunt for a man."

"I haven't the slightest thought. He may be living as a cow-puncher on the range. Or he may be in New York City playing the market. He's liable to try almost anything."

"It's a dark trail," sighed Geraldi, "but I'll try it." He added: "Who was the man he killed?"

"Sam Lapaz."

"A Spaniard?"

"No, I don't think so. His last name was one word. Oh, if I only could give you a starting point for the trail! Because after to-night, if you get away, I'm afraid that Cousin Edgar will be desperate and try desperate measures!"

"Perhaps he will," answered Geraldi. "There's a handicap. But many a long chance comes home. There's that to remember."

"One last thing—your reward! I have money of my own which even Cousin Edgar doesn't touch. You'll have whatever you want. Ten—twenty—thirty thousand dollars. Whatever you want. If you can trust me to give you what you ask?"

Perhaps there was a streak of foreign blood in Geraldi. Certainly there was a touch of foreign manners. He kissed her hand.

"We'll talk of that afterward," said Geraldi. "Good-by. Only one last thing. If I were you, I'd carry a gun in this house. Something small that you can keep about you—and a steady hand to use it. Good-by again!"

And he vanished down the hall, and through the front door.

He was no sooner outside it than he stepped sidewise, then leaped from the edge of the porch. Within the front fence of the yard a high border of geraniums grew, trained up on sticks so that it grew tall and thick. In the shadow of this Geraldi crouched and waited. He had only a moment to pause there. Then half a dozen shadows trooped through the front gate and shut it behind them without a click.

He heard the whisper of Cousin Edgar distinctly:

"You—and you—into the back yard. Don't give a warning. If you see a man who moves like a cat, start shooting. Do you hear? It's five thousand to the boy who downs him. Five thousand spot cash! You—and you, take the front yard. All of you keep alive. He's liable to do anything. Pop out of a window and drop on your heads. You take that side. You take the other."

"Like fun I will!" said the murmur of Chalmers. "I'll stand in back. That's the way he'll run. And I'm gunna wring his neck, I tell you. I feel in my bones that I'm gunna have the wringing of it!"

They departed to their separate posts. One man remained.

"Renney, I count most on you. Go wherever you choose!"

That was the final order. Cousin Edgar went softly up the steps of the porch. The door opened and closed silently upon him. And at the same time the shadow of Dick Renney stepped into the gloom of the geranium hedge and crouched not two yards from Geraldi!

He recognized, instinctively, the touch of the master. The sixth sense of Renney had brought him, even without his knowledge, perilously close to his quarry.

Still, Geraldi could afford to smile as he kept his covert. But he had a gun in his hand. It might be that some one would grow desperate and use a flashlight. In that case he would have to shoot; and first of all, heaven help Dick Renney!

Now, inside the house, he heard the

squeaking of steps. Cousin Edgar was coming down from his room noisily. He had found his present, at last!

The light from the open window of the library fell not ten feet from Geraldi. He heard the opening of the library door. He even made out the cheerful voice of Cousin Edgar.

"Well, Louise, where's our young friend, the adventurer?"

He could not hear the answer of Louise. He waited, almost expecting a noisy outburst. But, after all, that was not the way of Cousin Edgar.

Presently the shadow of the front door yawned wide. Cousin Edgar stood in the front path, and Dick Renney was instantly beside him. There was a sort of crouched eagerness and readiness about that fellow!

"He's gone," said Cousin Edgar in a whisper, but such a whisper as Geraldi never had heard before. There was more than even the hissing venom of an Oriental in it. "He's faded!"

"We'll hunt, then!" answered Renney.

"No, no! Listen to me, Renney! You have different work than that to do for me! Go around and dismiss the rest of them. Let them know that he's gone, but tell every man of them that my offer stands. Five thousand for the death of him, and I don't care how he's killed!"

"That's liberal," said Renney.

"Liberal? Man, if you can manage it, I'll give you a crown of gold! But listen to me."

"Governor, I'm markin' you like a pointer!"

"Do you see that first window to the left above the front porch?"

"I see it."

"Could you climb up to that window?"

"In about five seconds."

"Then, after you've sent them away, climb up there. I'll be in my room, and I want to see you!"

"It's done."

Cousin Edgar disappeared into the house. The hired men whom he had fetched presently came trooping—still, silent shadows—and thronged out the front gate. Only Chalmers paused for a moment's conversation with Renney. His voice was a bass rumble, barely heard.

"You dirty dog, Renney, you've spotted him, and you're saving him for yourself! But if I find that you've double-crossed me, I'll have your life, you swine!"

Renney laughed—a mere catch of the breath. He seemed to take this violent language as a pleasantry. After big Chalmers had gone, the gunman waited a moment, leaning on the gate. He was a slight figure. It seemed odd to Geraldi that so much fame should be locked up in so small a form, but certainly Renney was a name to conjure with. Usually the deeds of men in the West only became noised abroad after their death; but Renney already had made much newspaper copy. There was something about the fellow that was like a flame. It consumed the imagination. And like fire was his touch. No one had stood before him, and yet it was said that eighteen men—white and gun fighters themselves—had gone down before him. As for Mexicans, their number, of course, was uncounted.

So Geraldi kneeled in the shadow of the geraniums, and asked himself, gravely, whether he or Renney would conquer when they met. He had a shrewd idea that the shortest course for him would be to put a bullet through that agile body, then and there, but he forebore. The creed of Geraldi was not long, but it was as binding as adamant.

Presently, when the last of the men of Chalmers were gone, Renney turned back toward the house. He stood for a moment under the front porch, looking so small, so slight, that Geraldi al-

most thought that he would abandon his attempt. However, that was not in the mind of the other.

He was simply determining the best course, and having made up his mind, he quickly scaled the pillar of the porch, stepped lightly on the roof, and disappeared into the window indicated by Cousin Edgar, which that thoughtful gentleman had obligingly left slightly open.

CHAPTER XI.

INTERESTING CONVERSATION.

WHAT had been easy for Renney was still simpler for the acrobatic skill of Geraldi. He did not "swarm" up the height like a sailor; he went up it like a man going up a ladder, at his ease.

Several feet below the window through which Renney had disappeared there was the top of the outer frame of the window of a room beneath; that top made a firm base for the foot of Geraldi. His head came just above the level of the sill of the upper casement, and therefore he was ideally placed for spying on those within the room.

He found Renney and Cousin Edgar seated at a center table. The latter had lost no time in opening his business, but already had a map spread on the table. With all his might, Geraldi strained his eyes at the map and tried to make out the spot which the fat man was pointing out with the pressure of a pale, soft finger.

But the angle was too flat. He could see nothing surely.

"Then you have the place in mind, Mr. Renney?"

"Sure, I have," said Renney.

"The next subject we should discuss is remuneration."

"You gave me a description of this gent, but what's his name?" asked Renney.

"That isn't important, Mr. Renney."

"Ain't it?" said the gunman softly. "To me it is, though."

Cousin Edgar smiled blandly upon his companion.

"Suppose that I take a flying guess?" suggested Renney.

Cousin Edgar was tapping the edge of the table, making no noise with the tips of his soft fingers.

"Suppose that I say his name is Asprey?" snapped Renney. "Robert Asprey, eh? And your cousin!"

The white hand of Cousin Edgar no longer tapped the table. Otherwise he showed no emotion.

"And what's in a name?" asked Cousin Edgar gently.

"Price is in a name," answered Renney.

He grinned with venomous pleasure, and then developed the thought.

"You gimme a job to go out and soak some common bum. What do I ask? Maybe a thousand. I dunno. Maybe I do it for fun. But here you hand me a fighting man. Well, that'll cost you something, friend."

Renney felt so sure of himself that he thrust his hands in the side pockets of his trousers and tilted back in his chair, grinning steadily into the face of Cousin Edgar. The estimation in which the eavesdropper held the gunman mounted high at once. He knew what it meant to sustain the weight of Cousin Edgar's attention. But Renney was steady as stone.

"I'm a reasonable man," said Edgar Asprey. "So what's your price?"

"Twenty-five thousand bucks will about cover the bill," said Renney.

Cousin Edgar permitted himself to smile. He made no other rejoinder.

"Are you gunna talk turkey?" demanded the gunman sharply.

"You've named your price; and it seems to me that you've answered yourself," replied Cousin Edgar.

Renney pushed back his chair and rose.

"It don't sound to you, then?" he asked abruptly.

Cousin Edgar shook his head, and the flap beneath his chin wagged solemnly.

"Then good night, Mr. Asprey. There ain't any use in us wasting time."

He started for the window, but Geraldi did not move. He was quite certain that the conversation would not end at that point, and he was right. Halfway to the window, Renney whirled about on his heel. All his motions were as light and quick as the movements of a bird.

"Hold on!" he said. "Suppose that I find what you wanted to gimme for this job?"

"Ten thousand dollars," said Cousin Edgar.

"It ain't enough!"

"And yet," replied Cousin Edgar, "for all the work that you've done in the past, you've never had such a price before!"

"Tell me, bo," asked Renney, advancing to the table and resting his fist upon it. "Tell me what you know about the work that I've done in the past?"

"I know everything," answered Cousin Edgar, as gently as ever.

"Aw, you do. Nobody does!"

"Do you want instances?"

"Come on. You can't bluff me! Come on with your instances! What was the first job I ever done?"

"That was a charity job," said Cousin Edgar. "You did it for nothing."

"You're guessing," answered Renney instantly. "Gimme some particulars, if you can."

"Certainly. You were a young boy —barely fourteen. You were fond of a sixteen-year-old girl whose name was——"

"Oh, let the name go," said Renney, with a touch of emotion. "Get on to the story."

"A young cow-puncher also was fond of her. She cut a dance with you in favor of him, and then the heart of youth turned to fire in the breast of young Dick Renney. He waited for the cow-puncher outside the hall, and when he came through the door, shot him securely from the dark."

Renney paused.

"It's a lie!" he announced.

Cousin Edgar had begun to pat the table with his soft hand again. He made no answer.

"Well, what next?" asked Renney viciously.

"That shooting wasn't traced to you. You were too young to be suspected. Nevertheless, it gave you confidence. And when two Mexicans shouldered you in the street, you tackled the pair of them. One of them died the next day of his wounds. The other was crippled for life."

"Everybody knows that story," said Renney with satisfaction.

"Do you want me only to deal with the secret chapters of your life?" asked Cousin Edgar genially.

"Yep. Lemme have some of them," said Renney.

"Like many an errant knight," said Cousin Edgar, "you always have had a weakness for the fairer sex. Pretty girls upset your mind, my friend. Now, it so happened that one day you were traveling through a mountain pass with the blood of a fresh wound congealing on your side, and presently your horse, worn out by the spur and the work, died under you. In its fall you were pinned down to the ground. You were too weak to work yourself loose. The wind was very cold; snow began to drift around you. Your leg was numb. The pain in your side grew more and more severe, and finally the drowsiness which precedes death by exposure began to pass over you—is that enough?"

"Go on," said Renney through his teeth.

"You were found there by a hardy fellow, a trapper who worked through those high mountains. He did not ask whether you were worthy of help. He simply told himself that he saw a man dying, and therefore he got you from beneath the horse and carried you on his back—he was a tall, strong man—down to his shack, more than a mile away. There you were nursed back to strength by the trapper and his daughter. And as the warm spring of the year came on, with the blossoming of the flowers—shall I say?—love came to the two of you. The trapper was blind for some time. At last he asked you to leave the house. You left, but came back at night; yet it happened that the trapper was on the watch. He challenged you and asked you to leave. Your answer was a bullet through the brain. After that, you took his best horse and fled on it."

"And who's been telling you that pack of lies?" growled Renney hoarsely.

"You asked me for secret chapters from your life, and I've obeyed. Will you have any more?"

"Go on, then!"

"The next noteworthy occasion occurred on the Rio Grande. There was a Mexican who kept a little irrigated patch of alfalfa on the bank of the rivers. He was a poor man with half a dozen goats, a donkey and a mule. Also, he had a daughter who was just beginning to smile at men, and who——"

"Leave it be, will you?" snarled Renney.

Cousin Edgar was silent, and Renney, after a moment, began to walk up and down the room. His foot made not the slightest sound, and Slim Jim watched with a more intense interest. He, too, was a master of that art, and he knew the training and the natural gift that is required for it.

Renney halted.

"Who gave you all that dope on me?" he asked.

"I didn't find it in a newspaper," smiled Cousin Edgar.

Renney paused. His nostrils were flaring and his face was an ugly study. There was no decency in the man. The cruelty of a barbarian shone at his eyes.

"We'll get back to business again," said he. "You would give ten thousand for this bird. You say it's more than I ever got. Well, that's true. But here I ought to get a fatter slice."

"I'll wait for you to explain that," suggested Cousin Edgar.

"In the first place," expanded Renney, "it's a dirty job. A gent that kills a cousin had ought to pay higher. A gent that gets his cousin killed by a hired man ought to pay still higher."

"You grow philosophic," smiled Cousin Edgar.

"You live fat and easy in his house," went on Renney. "You got his money sticking to your fingers——"

"Will you tell me why you say that?" asked Cousin Edgar simply.

"You handle all his stuff, don't you? And you run all the Asprey business, don't you? Everybody knows what that timber land pays you for the last couple of years. I say, when you bump your cousin off, you get the whole cheese. Well—I want a bigger slice, that's all. Besides, it ain't an easy job. Asprey's a fighting man. I knew him right here in town! I want twenty-five thousand. That's my figger."

"I'm sorry," said bland Cousin Edgar.

"You're sorry, are you? Suppose that I go and sell what I know to Asprey? You've told me where to find him!"

"You couldn't do it," said Cousin Edgar. "Because I have ways of warning him from the distance. You wouldn't find him when you arrived at the place."

"You're slick!" admitted Renney.

"Look here, chief, I got a liking and an admiration for you. We'll call it twenty thousand flat and shake hands!"

To the astonishment of Geraldi, the other replied instantly: "That figure is high, but I like to find a man who realizes his own worth. We'll call it twenty thousand, Renney!"

The small, bony hand of Renney was stretched forth. That of Cousin Edgar closed over it.

"Another matter," said Cousin Edgar. "You've heard about the young vagrant who picked the pocket of Chalmers?"

"I ain't heard nothin' but, at the hotel," chuckled Renney. "Aw, Chalmers is wild! He'd give his gun for a whack at that kid."

"That same young man," said Cousin Edgar, "is mixed in this affair. He, also, will be trying to find—your man."

Renney grinned with malicious curiosity.

"You don't like to name him, do you?" he said. "Well, I don't wonder at it!"

"About the boy—Geraldi," went on Cousin Edgar, not noticing the comment, "if you should meet him——"

"I'll send him back to Chalmers by parcel post."

Cousin Edgar smiled and shook his head.

"My dear, young friend," said he. "My clever, active, brave, and patient, young friend, I don't want you to make a mistake. This boy is very dangerous."

"He run like a rabbit from Chalmers. "How come, then, if he's a hot one?"

"He hates unnecessary risks. Being very intelligent, he never kills merely for the pleasure of killing, but only when an absolute necessity comes to him. Such men are always to be feared, because they never act except with forethought."

"All right," said Renney. "I know him. I thought that he was only a fancy card shark. But if I meet him, I'll bump him off."

"Do so," said the other gravely. "Do so, because otherwise he may give you great trouble."

"I'll pass a chunk of lead through him," said Renney with assurance.

"Just one moment," said Cousin Edgar. "I love your enthusiasm, Renney. I love the whole-hearted abandon with which you go about these affairs. It is the sign of the artist—working out a full heart. But this young Geraldi—if that's his name——"

"Well, go on. What about him?"

"You've killed your men, in your day, Renney."

"I've done my share," nodded Renney, and shrugged his shoulders.

"The share of young Geraldi, you may be interested to know, has been even larger."

Renney frowned.

"That's a lie on the face of it! Somebody's been filling you up."

"No one ever fills me up, as you adroitly put it. Furthermore, all his men were killed face to face, Renney."

"Meaning what?" snarled Renney.

"Meaning that if he comes on your trail you'll earn your twenty thousand dollars, my dear young friend. And that, I believe, ends our talk?"

And he rose placidly from his chair as he spoke.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE AFTER ANOTHER.

GERALDI melted down the face of the house, reached the front yard, and dropped in the shadow of the geraniums. He was hardly there before Renney in turn emerged from the window, descended with noiseless agility, and passed out from the yard by means of the gate.

He turned down the street, and Geraldi moved behind him, having leaped lightly over geranium hedge and

fence to gain the sidewalk. It was a difficult task to stalk Renney in such a place, for though the sidewalk was shaded and set off from the street by a row of pepper trees, yet the trunks of those trees were so slender that a man easily could have been detected passing behind them. Moreover, shafts of lamplight streamed out through open doors and windows, for the night was warm.

Still, he managed to keep Renney in sight, until the latter came to the railroad yard. There he disappeared in the shadows among the piles of recently unloaded timber, but the trailer felt that he understood the meaning of this new direction. Renney was determined to take a train out of the town and proceed with his work at once. He was, as Cousin Edgar had said, admirably fervid in the performance of his work!

If Geraldi had any doubts, they would have disappeared the next moment with the song of rails as a train drew near, and then its owlish hootings echoed from afar.

Geraldi, from the gloom of the lee of a timber pile, watched the freight train thunder in, with flashes from the wheels, and a hot glow from the firebox. He waited until it started on again, saw the brakeman with his lantern swingaboard, the calaboose, and then watched a figure run from the side and bound up against the iron ladder which ran up the steps of the third box car from the front. He imitated that example on the car next to the rear of the train.

Flattened on the roof, he took note of his surroundings. Then he stretched on his back to rest. The stars all were out. There was not a cloud blown across them, but only those deep wells of shadow which show here and there across the face of the heavens on the brightest of nights. So he studied those familiar constellations, which traveled serenely with him far above, no matter how swiftly the train thundered through the night with clanking of trucks and with rattling of cars.

He was glad of the open again, glad of the speed of the train. It was as though he absorbed some of its resistless energy. But so, driven across the night, all his faculties worked more smothly, more keenly. He had on his hands as difficult a task as he could have asked for. Merely to deal with Cousin Edgar might have been hard enough. But, furthermore, he was handicapped with the weight of Renney, and a great weight he knew that rascal might prove in the final battle! But follow Renney he must. It was the trail of Renney which must lead him to the final goal, and he started on it now with a vague prayer that, having come to the goal, he might strike down Renney before that bloodhound could be at Robert Asprey.

In addition, he was wanted by the law; and if Renney found him on the trail, the gunman did not need to take the work into his own hands. He simply could inform the police that a pickpocket, wanted by the law officers of Sankeytown, was present in the person of Geraldi. That would be enough. Chalmers alone could be depended upon to make his share of trouble.

The frigate bird smiled into the mysterious deeps of the skies. He had been in situations fully as bad—worse! But always before he could drop out of sight, take wing, and disappear beyond the horizon, even in this century where the wireless has stretched horizons to an indefinite width. Now, however, it was different. He worked with an anchor—a weight of lead dependent from his neck, and that was the obligation to find Asprey for the girl.

The train struck a grade, slowed to it, and then began to pant and struggle with all its might, slowly heaving up the steep incline. It was time to be wary. To the left, a cliff wall rose

sheer, close by. To the right, there was the space for the second track, and therefore to that side he gave his attention, and only in time to see a shadow drop from far forward and, running to the side, disappear in the brush which grew there.

Geraldi hesitated. It might well be that this was some vagrant. There was hardly better than one chance in two that it was Renney. And if he dropped in pursuit, he would certainly be seen by the gunman, if it were he.

He determined to get off the train, but he waited until it had swung around the next turn. Then he climbed down the ladder and, as the grade flattened and the engine gathered speed, he dropped to the ground. His foot slipped on a round stone. He rolled head over heels and came to his feet again, rather dazed.

But there is an art in falling, a fine art, which he had learned long ago from tumblers in the circus. He was shaken, but hardly bruised, and he ran at once for the brush.

Crouched there, he watched the train roar past, with the tail light dimmed by the swirl of dust which the suction beneath the cars had raised. Then the light itself was jerked out of sight beyond the next turn of the winding way. The noise grew dim and far off at once, but as the engine beat around distant cliffs, fresh waves of sound came loudly back to him.

He was alone, except for that other shadow, somewhere in the brush behind him. And, if it were not Renney, he had totally lost the trail of Robert Asprey.

If it were Renney, two things might have moved the gunman to leave the train. The first might have been that he knew a pursuer was on it. The second might be that he had wished to make a false start and double back, not sure that he was followed, but simply making security doubly secure.

He himself, in a similar situation, would have done the same thing, he felt.

He began to make his way back around the curve, keeping well within the brush, sharpening his senses; but moving swiftly. He had served his time as a woodsman; the uncanny lightness of his foot was a vast help to him; but he felt that there were many others more at home in this craft than he.

When he came to that point at which the track straightened on the long down grade, he ventured to the verge of the brush and there crouched and watched. Lying low as he did, the eastern stars twinkled up the polished tops of the rails, and whatever moved across the way would be seen at any reasonable distance. It might be that the tramp, however, had turned straight back into the brush, intent on camping out for the night on some known spot. From Renney that would not be expected.

He hardly had turned these thoughts in his mind when a man stepped noiselessly out of the brush and stood at the edge of the track. His hands were in his pockets. His cap was pulled low on his head. Something in the meager outline of his shoulders and the forward jutting of his head told Geraldi that this was Renney again.

The man was whistling softly, as if in thorough content. Then he turned down the track and began walking the ties back toward Sankeytown.

CHAPTER XIII.

SIX-FIFTEEN.

TOWARD Sankeytown the stranger wended, and Geraldi followed cautiously, feeling all the while that there must be something to be gained from patience.

He had been over an hour on the train, therefore thirty miles separated him from the town, or perhaps more. But just at the foot of the slope down

which he was going at the present time the train had whirled through a small blur of lights, and Geraldi was fairly sure that his quarry would use that town as a starting place for his next stage of the journey.

The moon came up. It made the eastern mountains seem wonderfully near, and steep as sheer cliffs of black rock; to the west over his shoulder, on the other hand, the country dissolved in misty waves. However, there was enough light to make him fear lest Renney should become aware of his pursuer. He dropped back until Renney's form, ahead of him, was a glimmer that faded and grew again, guessed at rather than seen.

The tracks curved a little to the right, in a wide and sweeping bend, and now they entered the squat shadows of the village. It was about the dimensions of Sankeytown, he guessed, and he was glad of that. It provided a bigger background in which he could lose himself while he waited for the next train.

By the railroad, he was sure, Renney would travel. A horse would be far too slow for him! And Geraldi had an idea that Robert Asprey must be at a great distance from the house where his family lived. Otherwise, he would be sure to make a desperate effort to visit his wife and daughter. But the conviction being strong in Geraldi that his quarry would travel by the train alone, he was at ease. He could do what he chose, so long as he was on hand to watch the trains.

Close up to the station went Renney, and Geraldi saw him disappear into a little all-night lunch counter, one of those places which are apt to be open in a town where railroad men flourish in any numbers. Through the smoky glass of the swinging door he saw Renney settle himself before the counter and order rapidly and at some length.

Then, contented, Geraldi crossed the street, where the very fellow of this lunch counter was established. In fact, it seemed to be the older brother of the pair. Its counter was covered with oilcloth which had been scrubbed or elbow-worn to tatters. Its array of cans was not imposing, and the cook-waiter looked up with an air of irritation from his newspaper when he saw Geraldi enter.

Nothing can be cooked more quickly than a hamburg steak. This and bread and coffee and a wedge of soggy apple pie Geraldi ordered and paid for. The "steak," when he received it, was composed more of breadcrumbs and onions than of meat, but he ate it with the patience of one who has had to put up with much worse fare. He ate it with greediness, even. For he felt that it might be his last chance in a long, long time before he was able to eat again.

When he was halfway through the steak, he was aware that the cook was staring past him. The little shack quivered with a soft but heavy footfall. Geraldi looked over his shoulder and saw a sawed-off shotgun approaching with two vast, ugly, black mouths pointed toward him. Accompanying the shotgun was as big a man as Geraldi had seen in many a day. He was no lumbering hulk, but the hard-boiled essence of fighting strength.

"All right, bo," said he, "I want you!"

"You want me for what?" asked Geraldi mildly.

"For picking the pocket of Chalmers in Sankeytown. That's all!"

Geraldi turned a little further in his chair.

"Shove up your hands."

"Willingly," said Geraldi.

Now, from the corner of his eye, he was aware of a shadow that had flitted from the rear door of the lunch counter. And he had just time in that glance to note the slight hump of the shoulders and the forward thrust of the head. Renney!

Working under a handicap, with all the cards in the favor of his enemy, Renney had played the game and won it easily. Geraldi made that admission to himself, and then stood up at the order of the deputy sheriff and allowed his hands to be fastened behind his back by the cook, at the direction of the man of the law.

"Pull them cords tight," said the deputy. "This here is a bird that's all oil and feathers, they tell me. Now, kid, you walk ahead of me. You can spend the night in jail or in the cemetery, whichever you pick. Understand?"

"I know a man when I see one," said Geraldi, and walked obediently, straight from the shack and then down the center of the street. It was too late for a crowd to follow them. They went to the jail, and Geraldi, to his great disappointment, found a little up-to-date building of heavy stone. The cells were gathered in one intricate network of tool-proof steel.

The jailor came to the office of the sheriff and helped to search Geraldi. There were many exclamations of professional delight as they drew out from the pockets of Geraldi first the bar of strong steel, and then one by one other small implements.

"Picking pockets? Say, he could pick a bank!" said the jailor.

The deputy watched with sparkling eyes. He saw political recognition in such a capture as this.

He saw that the search proceeded with care. Geraldi was forced to strip and stand shivering while every inch of his clothes was probed and gone over by hand. Then he was permitted to don the clothes again. The deputy picked out a cell in the middle of the cell room and departed with a final warning to the jailer:

"Keep your eye on him. He's slippery. I got the tip from one that knows!"

The jailer, accordingly, stood outside the cell for some time, lantern in hand.

"Where'd you learn the trade?" he asked.

"I grew up with it," Geraldi assured him.

"Always the same line?" asked the jailer. Then he answered his own question: "Sure, it's always that way. One line, always the same. That's what makes you crooks so easy to tumble to. What you do once, you'll do again. You got no variety. I should think you'd branch out a little!"

Geraldi looked down at his feet. They were securely ironed. His hands were held by powerful handcuffs.

"My friend," said he, "if you don't mind, I'll go to sleep. I want to get the first train out."

The jailer was willing to chuckle.

"That'll be the six-fifteen," said he. "Maybe I'd better give you a call a few minutes before?"

"Thank you," smiled Geraldi. "Good night!"

"Good night, kid! The six-fifteen!"

He went off, still chuckling, and settled himself in a chair in a corner of the cell room. There he yawned noisily a few times. The chair creaked as he settled down in it. In half an hour, he was snoring.

A clock struck the hour, beating out six heavy strokes that sent the alarm circling out in slow waves through the heavy, damp air of the night. Geraldi, half in a stupor on his cot, seemed to be aroused by this sound.

He straightened, listened to the snoring of the guard for a moment, and then worked gently at his handcuffs. Supple hands will fold in at the palm and grow smaller than the wrists. Any child can do the trick. It is simple even for grown men, if they keep the muscles sleek enough. Now Geraldi pulled his hands through the steel rings with ease and deposited the handcuffs on the cot.

His feet were still fast. And between

him and liberty remained three locked doors; that of his cell, that into the deputy sheriff's office, and that from the office to the outside of the building. From the inside of the sole of his right shoe, he drew out a small, flat blade of steel, and with this he worked diligently at the lock of his foot irons. The mechanism was perfectly oiled. In an instant it gave way, noiselessly, and Geraldi stood up, free in person, at least.

He stretched himself deliberately, limb by limb. Then he attacked the lock of his cell door. He had to reach over and work at it from the outside, but in this manner he made some progress. At last he reached the crucial bolt. It stirred. The bolt itself was shoved easily back, and Geraldi walked through the door into the aisle.

He found that the jailer was nodding heavily in his chair, a relaxed and helpless bulk, with the light from his own lantern flooding up toward him. Behind that chair, Geraldi had to walk to get at the door of the sheriff's office, but as he reached it, he heard the long hoot of a train's whistle, dim and dreary with distance.

The sleeper roused with a jerk.

He sat up, swaying a little in his chair, and Geraldi grew tense, waiting.

"Six-fifteen," murmured the jailer, and sank again into torpor.

Geraldi opened the door, and passed into the office.

There he found all that had been taken from him laid out on the desk of the deputy, even the bulging wad of money which once had been the possession of Chalmers in Sankeytown. There was a safe in the corner of the room, but the deputy evidently trusted so completely to the efficacy of his fine little jail that he did not bother with extra precautions. Geraldi lined his pockets as they had been lined before. The key stood in the outer door; in another moment he was in the fresh outer air, and the scream of the train's whistle pierced his ears.

He hurried. It was apt to be a short stop at such a station. And finding his way to the yard, in the gray of the morning, he heard the engine begin to snort while he was still at a distance. He had to sprint to make it. The long, lofty wall of a number of box cars shot past him. He saw the glimmer of an iron ladder, and, leaping at the guess, he missed with both feet and his right hand. Only the left caught a hold, but that was enough.

He regained the ladder with an effort, swarmed up to the top of the car—and found just above him a figure dimly drawn against the night, and the familiar outline of a Colt revolver leveled at his head. The holder was a small man, feet planted to the sway of the box car.

Renney?

"All right, bo," said the voice of the brakeman. "A dollar down on account, and you ride my division. Otherwise, I'll roll you, my lad."

CHAPTER XIV.

ALL ABOARD!

GERALDI paid.

"Anything else on board?" he asked.

"There's a negro in No. 7. That's an empty. I guess you know how to work the door."

Geraldi went back to No. 7 and "worked the door." It was not the simplest trick in the world to open the sliding door of a box car and then swing down into it from the top, but Geraldi managed it with the ease of long experience. He heard an exclamation from the darkness of the "empty."

"It's all right, bo," said Geraldi.

A match was lighted. A pair of gray-black hands cupped the flame and turned it upon him.

"Tramp royal!" announced the negro.

"All right, bo! Sit down and tell me what's been doing down the line."

"Give me your hand. Here's a dollar. Go back to the door and watch there. I'm going to sleep. Mind you, I sleep as light as a cat, but I don't want to be disturbed."

The negro chuckled.

"Turn in," said he. "I'll watch the door for you. I'll give you a call if anybody else drops in."

Geraldi contentedly stretched himself on the dancing boards of the old box car. The light was beginning to grow. Silver streaks of it broke the darkness in the car. There was much danger that, if this were the only empty on the train, Renney might show up in the car. However, it was a part of the philosophy of young Geraldi that a certain percentage of risk must be taken. He was very tired. Sleep he must have to remain efficient through the day. Therefore, he closed his eyes.

For three hours he was as the dead. Then he wakened and knew that some one was kneeling over him. He hardly dared to peer up through his eyelashes, but when he did, he saw the face of the negro, the eyes glittering with curiosity and greed and fear combined, as he bent over the sleeper. In his left hand he carried a knife. The right hand was stretched out toward the coat of Geraldi.

Curiosity had been too much for the black man. Geraldi groaned and stirred; instantly the other withdrew, and so Geraldi could sit up in safety.

"Thought you was gunna have your head jigged off by this road bed," said the negro amiably. "You are sure one of them champeen sleepers, bo!"

"Yes," said Geraldi, "but I usually wake up just in time."

The guilty eyes of the negro flickered to this side and to that. Then he grinned, and Geraldi grinned back. One ounce of understanding was better with these people than tons of sham.

He offered a cigarette. It was accepted. They smoked in amiable silence, regarding one another with frank interest. Two seconds more of his slumber and Geraldi would have been dead, with that knife through his heart, for the sake of the bulge of bills that swelled his vest pocket; but the worst had not happened. Therefore he was able to smile.

"No stops yet?" he asked as a matter of course.

The negro shook his head.

"Who closed the door?"

"The shack gimme the high sign," his companion answered.

"Why?"

"Ah dunno, boss. I never asked no shack to tell me what he was thinkin'. I jus' done what he said."

Geraldi tried the door. It was fast locked.

"He'll sure open it up at the first station," said the negro.

"You hound!" said Geraldi with soft unction.

The negro started. His face turned savage and his eyes went small.

"Who you callin' a houn'?" he asked in a voice that was high and thin. "Who you callin' houn'? Ah don' take that from nobody, bo!"

He had pitched himself to his knees, his hands deep in his coat pockets, certainly fumbling at weapons of some sort. But Geraldi moved his hand openly, yet so swiftly that with speed it seemed to disappear. He held the leveled gun braced over his up-jutting knees.

"Take 'em out," advised Geraldi, and smiled down the shining barrel of his gun.

The negro did not hesitate. He drew forth his hands and thrust them well above his head.

"Now, we'll talk," said Geraldi. "We'll begin with the doors. Who told you to close them?"

"The shack—the brakie," said the

man, blinking his eyes rapidly. "I told you that before, governor."

"You lying snake!" said Geraldi, guessing at random.

"Ah dunno then who he was," groaned the tramp. "Never seen him before."

"He came down and saw me?"

"Boss—he sure did."

"What did he slip you?"

"He give me——"

"Five dollars."

"Five bucks it was," sighed the negro. "You know everything anyway, boss. There wasn't no harm in what I done, was there?"

"You had him promise to open the door for you?"

"He sure did promise."

"You silly fool, when the door *is* opened, you'll be jailed along with me. Have you a knife?"

"A sort of little penknife, boss."

"Look at that board behind you. Isn't that old, half-rotten wood?"

The negro knocked the plank with his knuckles.

"It is, boss."

"Start working on that, then. Carve with that knife of yours."

The black man took out the same long and heavy weapon which Geraldi had seen when he wakened from his sleep. He seemed as much frightened on his own account, now, as he had been before when the gun first covered him, and he cut strongly into the wood. It gave readily. In a mere moment he had slashed out a trough and threatened to drive the knife straight through the plank. But this was not wanted by Geraldi. He directed operations until two boards had been cut through so that they were hanging by mere splinters. They could be knocked out or drawn in, at the will of the captives. And they had not fairly finished this work when the engine hooted for a stop.

It might be that Renney had left the train when he discovered that his persistent pursuer was with him again. It might be that he had remained with it, and Geraldi inclined to the latter opinion. It was unlike such an efficient worker as Renney to make too many delays.

Therefore, he was on this train still, and would be watching the car which held his pursuer; watching it like a hawk, now that the freight was drawing into the station.

They broke out the boards, and drew them into the car. If they were cast outside, Renney was too apt to see them fall and know that the birds were ready to fly.

The brakes were beginning to grind. Looking out cautiously, Geraldi saw that they were entering a large yard. A maze of steel rails flashed under his eyes, blurred together with speed, then detached and formed a steady pattern as the speed of the train decreased.

He stepped into the opening.

"Don't you do it!" said the negro, closing his eyes in a panic. "You'll smash yourself to pulp!"

But Geraldi had made up his mind. He swung out suddenly through the aperture, prepared himself, and dropped. He hit the ground running at full speed, and that, of course, diminished the shock. Even so, he went staggering, as though a vast load were heaped on his shoulders, unstringing his legs at the knees.

He could hardly endure that weight, and then, glancing up, he saw Renney on the ladder of the car immediately preceding his. Renney was facing straight out, prepared for the drop. He apparently was willing to trust the wooden prison to hold his enemy.

He dropped to the ground and began running as Geraldi had done. In the meantime, the latter had regained his nervous control. He was able to slow up and, veering sharply to the right, he cut in around the tail of a long pas-

senger train which stood before the station.

He did not hesitate. He climbed up the first steps, paused an instant to brush off the dust which covered him, then walked down the line of the cars, found an empty seat in the smoker, and dropped into it.

He was very willing to wager that his quarry would use the wings of this same train to help him on his way. The engine began to labor. The train heeled and swayed around a curve, and then gathered speed. Was Renney aboard? He would have to gamble on that.

He remained in his seat. He had taken the corner one in front, which looked down the double row of chairs and, picking up a newspaper which lay on the floor, he screened himself behind this, only allowing himself a glimpse now and again, as though the vibration of the train and its swaying were driving his hands to the side.

By those glimpses, at the first, he saw nothing whatever except the conglomeration of men of all sorts one usually finds on a local passenger train. But, half an hour from the start, he was aware of a small man, his clothes very dusty, who came in and dropped into the first vacant place. He walked with a singular perfection of poise and lightness, and his head was thrust out a little, in an aggressive manner.

It was Renney!

Geraldi rose at once and turned onto the platform at the front of the car. He trusted that he had not been seen, but when he ventured a glance back through the glass of the door, he noted that Renney was looking fixedly in his direction, with brows gathered to a shadow of thought.

He could guess, then, that Renney had seen his back as he went out, and if not recognizing it, the sight had been at least sufficiently familiar to trouble the mind of that arch criminal. If that were the case, then surely Renney would come to investigate!

He had hardly determined that when he saw Renney rise from his place and come lightly up the aisle, swaying easily with the heave and pitch of the car.

CHAPTER XV.

WHO FOLLOWS?

THERE was only one way to escape the coming of Renney. Geraldi took it by gripping the overhanging edge of the car's side and so clambering onto the roof.

Nothing in the world is so little framed to be sat upon as the roof of a passenger car in these days. There are no flat places, and every jerk, every jar, thrusts one almost irresistibly toward the edge the fall from which is death.

Yet Geraldi stood up and ran back along the train—actually ran, the swift drive of the train making the roof seem to rise to meet his feet. He sped back along two cars, and then he dropped flat and watched.

What Renney could do he was unable to guess. But he knew that the little man would understand, stepping out onto the platform and finding that the owner of the suspicious back had disappeared utterly. He would know that it was Geraldi, of course. But what would he do about it?

Would he undertake the difficult task of getting off the train unobserved and changing to another, at the great risk of having all his labor for nothing? Or would he attempt to have Geraldi thrown from the cars, and so solve the problem at once.

One answer came immediately.

Suddenly a man stood erect on the top of the pitching, swaying train. He stood lightly, undisturbed, and, drawing a revolver, he fired straight down at Geraldi.

The latter heard the crash of the gun,

almost stifled by the roaring of the train, which was swaying and heaving over a very rough section of the track, and the noise was flung out from the face of a mountain wall at the left, to pass on the right out over the empty, unechoing void of a great valley.

Geraldi, then, strove to swing away from the second shot, and he succeeded, but that very success nearly cost him his life. For he lost his finger-hold and rolled suddenly over the edge of the car roof. He had one mighty glimpse of the valley profundities beneath him, huge and still as eternity, and then his left arm, up to the elbow, hooked itself inside a window.

The wrench almost tore the arm from its socket, but it checked the fall; and in another moment Geraldi had wriggled through the window into the lavatory. There he remained for a time, massaging his shoulder until the strained ligaments seemed more normal, and finally washing his face and hands, and brushing some of the dust from his clothes. He was beginning to look a hopeless vagabond, by this time. Though dust could be brushed off, yet stains could not be made to disappear. And they were large and glaring, those grease spots which decorated him here and there.

But he could not remain in the lavatory indefinitely. He had to be out watching the movements of Renney. That active genius might well have taken it for granted that the fall of Geraldi had been caused by the impact of his bullet. And if he peered over the edge of the train and failed to note the body of Geraldi along the track, that might have been taken for granted, too. As a matter of fact, great boulders stood close to the track, and at the first roll a fallen man might have crashed down among them.

So there were great possibilities that Renney, contented, had gone back into the smoker, to sit down at ease and finish his trip. Or, if he were not sure, he would make a rapid tour through the train. Such a tour by this time must be completed.

So Geraldi complacently wandered back to the rear car. A scowling conductor was pacified with a five-dollar bill slipped covertly into his hand, and Geraldi sat down in the last seat and watched the mountains turning red and black as the afternoon sun lit up the western faces and left the eastern slopes in thick shadow. He regarded this grandeur and listened comfortably to the rattling of the trucks as the train hurried on.

At such a speed, even the great Renney could not very well dismount. The way led through a pass with lofty walls on either side. This opened again, suddenly, in the dusk of the day, and the train hooted for a stop. The halt came at a sprawling mountain town, and, slipping low in his seat, like one falling asleep, Geraldi studied the group which dismounted.

Last of all was his man. Renney himself sauntered carelessly over to the corner of the platform and surveyed the group which had left the train, like one who has no real suspicion, and therefore keeps lookout with only half an eye.

A savage thrill of satisfaction leaped through the body of Geraldi. Even Renney would not be a tithe so dangerous, now that complacent self-satisfaction came to him.

Then, stooping low, Geraldi hurried forward in the train and passed to the front coach as the engine once more began to puff and pant. On the steps farthest from the station, he studied his time, and as they drove past a line of freight cars on the siding, he dropped off and sprinted around behind them. By the time the passenger coaches had roared past, Geraldi was ensconced between two box cars, peering carefully forth, and he could see the unmistakable

outline of Renney's body and forward-jutting head as that little warrior still leaned against the corner of the station house.

Even in his time of triumph, Renney seemed capable of taking a good deal of precaution. But at last he turned away, and Geraldi did not hesitate. He streaked across the intervening tracks, and rounded the station house on the run, in time to see Renney sauntering idly up the main street of the town. Geraldi followed.

Three times the uneasy Renney whirled and looked back. Three times Geraldi was a slouching idler leaning against a tree, or the side of a building. At length the quarry turned in at the door of the hotel, and Geraldi boldly followed.

Glancing in, he was able to see the desk, with Renney in earnest conversation with the clerk. That conversation lasted some minutes, and, when it ended, Geraldi faded back behind a group of loud-voiced idlers on the veranda.

Renney came out at once, hung an instant on the verge of the steps, and then trotted down the street at an active gait. Geraldi left the veranda also. He had an idea that the chase was drawing so close to its goal that shadowing no longer would serve in the case of so keen a fellow as Renney. He must find out his goal.

He ran around the hotel at full speed and rushed into it, panting. Up to the clerk's desk he pushed and leaned on it, struggling, apparently, for his wind.

"Friend of mine here a moment ago. Asking for an old pal. He left word where he was going. Did he leave it with you?"

The clerk squinted at Geraldi. But a man red-faced with work never looks a suspicious character.

"Asking about Toomey?" he inquired.

"That's it." Geraldi nodded.

For, of course, Robert Asprey would not be known by his own name.

"He didn't leave any message for you."

"You think a minute. He must have."

"No."

"Well, then, where's Toomey. I'll go to him."

"You'll have to have a horse," grinned the clerk, and looked at the battered, dusty clothes of Geraldi.

"I have shanks' pony."

"You try walking the Lawson Trail," said the clerk with a serious nod.

"Well?"

"It's eight miles. Two hours by daylight."

He glanced toward the door, where the blue dusk was piled, darker than night in contrast with the yellow lamplight inside.

"Where does the trail begin?"

"Back of the town. Turn up the left side of the creek. There's only one trail all the way. Toomey has his shack about eight miles back. What's the rush of news for Toomey? Had a rich brother die?"

Geraldi left at once.

All Westerners were apt to look upon foot travel as a dreadful torture, but Geraldi knew many a trail where a man could leave in the distance the neatest-footed horse that ever stepped over mountain ways. By the tone of the clerk he judged this to be one, and therefore he did not wait to secure a horse. Doubtless Renney would be doing that, and the moments gained might put him ahead of the killer on the way.

He walked briskly down the main street, reached the creek, listened for a moment to the foaming rush of its waters, and then turned up the left-hand bank as he had been directed.

He broke into a dog trot.

Long ago he had learned the trick from Mexican Indians—the trick of

that shambling pace which wears out the miles with a patient endurance, calling least upon the wind of the runner.

In a moment the way began to pitch upwards. Still he maintained that steady pace, only shortening the stride, and lifting, lifting constantly through the darkness.

Difficult going it was. He could understand why the clerk had said two hours—by day! For he had to feel for every footfall, as it were, and twice he stumbled and almost fell, entangled in jutting rocks. Some hurrying mountain goat must have laid out the line of the road. There was nothing man-made or man-conceived about it. It sheered up. It jerked down.

And his wind began to give way. He had to fall back to a rapid walk. He began to climb what seemed almost a sheer wall, and finally, climbing along this, he reached a dizzy summit.

Standing in the blackness, he wondered how any horse could live on such ground, and, steady though his nerves were, he could not help a little shudder at the thought of striving to ride that way through the darkness. Behind him lay the vast, dark trough of the valley with the scattering yellow lights blossoming in its heart. Before him, stretched more tumbled wilderness of mountains, interminable, butting up against the stars.

He went on again down a sheer pitch, then the trail wound out more easily, and he could run once more. He judged that he had gone at least six or seven miles from the town, and he paused to take his breath. As he did so, he heard behind him the ring of the hoofs of a horse upon the rocks. He looked back, and saw flashes of fire struck from the stones. Some one was following. Renney?

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

FOUR PIONEERS REWARDED

ONE of the historic mining camps of the West—Alder Gulch, near Virginia City, Montana—has lost four pioneers with the recent departure for China of Chun Jack, Chew Way, Sunk Yok, and Sun Lung, who are going to live on the gold which they have gathered in years of toil from placer diggings deserted by white men as unprofitable. All four of the pioneers are between eighty and one hundred years old, so they have decided to return to Canton for a rest.

The men are veterans of Alder Gulch, having arrived there toward the end of the placer mining rush of the '60s. At that time, the presence of the Chinese was no longer resented by the native miners, because they believed that the ground was about "worked out."

Sometimes the daily clean-up was so small that the finding of a nugget the size of a pea was a cause for excitement in the camp. But living expenses were low, and constant saving during almost sixty years of toil has enabled them now to start their long journey back home.

A Cage of Glass

By
Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Tubby Saw Wood," etc.

HEH! Heh!" "Dad" Simms chuckled. "Looks like the dictionary. You sure this is the Los Angeles telephone directory, young lady? The last time I looked at one, thutty-eight years ago, you could put it in your eye and it wouldn't hurt much."

The attractive girl smiled. It was a relief to have a man smile at her impersonally and make sensible comments—even if the man was rather old.

"Yes, miss," he went on, "Los wasn't much of a place when I first came to it. Just got back here the other day, and danged if I can find a thing that looks natural, except the plaza—that and the sun! There ain't much change in the sun. I'm down here on a sort of bust. Come down from Cold Deck, Alasky, to march in the Memorial Day parade. Kinda been runnin' wild ever since. Figure on actin' in the movies some before I go North. Kinda got the rheumatics baked outa my joints and I'm skittish as a colt. Let's see, I almost forgot, I'm looking for the Malemute Fur Exchange."

"I'll find the number if you wish," the girl offered.

"Thanks! It'll save me a lot of squintin' if you will. My eyes ain't what they used to be. Kinda fadin', I guess. Heh! Heh! It didn't take you long. It's all in knowin' how. No, I don't want to call 'em up, just want to go down there and look 'em over. Friend of mine in Cold Deck—that's a minin' camp up in Alasky—got an offer to buy furs from them and he wants me to see what kind of a layout they've got. More'n one trapper's sent his fur Outside and never got nothin' for it! Thanks for the number, and here's a little suthin' for your trouble." Dad handed the girl a silver dollar and departed.

Outside, he hailed a taxi, and a half hour later found himself gazing at a sign that spoke for itself:

MALEMUTE FUR EXCHANGE.
Finest Alaska Fur.
From Trapper To Wearer.
All Kinds of Fur Bought and Sold.

Dad studied the place from across the street and then approached with misgivings. "Rough" Rhodes had five thousand dollars' worth of fur and in some manner this concern had heard of it. Letters had been exchanged and Rhodes had been impressed, but having, through bitter experience, learned to read letters with his tongue in his cheek, he had cabled Dad Simms to investigate.

As Dad drew closer his heart skipped a beat. Chained in the window was a Malemute dog. The sun beating through the window rendered the space like a section in a greenhouse. The dog's heavy coat—a coat that Nature had given him as protection against below-zero weather—added to the creature's misery. Obviously, it was an advertising scheme. The Alaska sled dog is an animal to attract instant attention. Many who saw the dog glanced to the adjoining window and saw furs at attractive prices.

But it was more than the dog's misery that roused Dad's ire and caused his heart to skip a beat. If he were not badly mistaken, that dog had once led his team. "If that ain't old Kusko," he growled, "then I'm a Mex buckaroo! Now, you old fool, just remember you ain't in Alasky and don't go off half cocked. You've got to use your brains!"

Swallowing his rage, Dad entered the establishment. The air was heavy with the odor of baled fur, which in itself suggested to those who entered that fur could be bought at wholesale prices.

Dad dare not trust himself to look at the dog. Without even glancing, he sensed that a change had come over the animal. The chain rattled as he stood up, and from his throat came a low, eager whine. Dad could not resist the desire to learn whether or not the dog was the leader he had lost several years ago. At that time he had blamed him for chasing a caribou. Now he could only feel pity for the mistreatment.

"Kusko!" he whispered.

The dog leaped with joy, and from the rear of the store came a man with a whip. "Excuse it, please," the man said, "sometimes he gets bad!"

"Don't whip him," Dad pleaded. With difficulty he fought down the desire to use the whip on the small, dark man whose every feature and mannerism indicated a grasping nature.

And because a prospective customer made the request, the man dropped the whip. "Them sled dogs get bad," he explained, "and they ain't so good. They don't live long. We've tried feedin' 'em plenty, and again we try starvin' 'em, and always it's the same —they get weak and die."

Dad knew the reason. Anything chained in that hot window would die. It would tax the resistance of a lizard to the limit. "Let's see what you've got in the way of a blue fox!" Dad said.

The man displayed some blue-fox pelts that a Siwash trapper would not have taken the trouble to pack a mile. Obviously, the skins had been taken out of prime. "The best wild blue foxes," the man explained, "you won't find 'em any cheaper nor better in the city."

"Nope," Dad snapped, "they ain't what I'm lookin' for. These are island foxes, raised in pens, and danged poor pelts!" He glanced around. "Say, how much do you want for that dog?"

"One hun——"

That was as far as he got. Another

and darker man, who had been hovering in the rear of the establishment, spoke sharply. "Moe! Right away you should come to the phone."

Dad had not heard the telephone ring. He blinked his eyes and waited. Moe's partner followed him into the private office. "Moe," he said, "you should ask him two hundred dollars. He's one of them sour doughs and he loves dogs. I can tell it! I've seen 'em when I've been North. If he feels sorry enough, he'll pay it!"

Moe nodded. The dog had not cost them much. The partner had picked him up at Seward when no one was looking. The boat fare had been about eleven dollars. He rubbed his hands and returned. "So help me," he began, "that's one of the finest dogs in Alaska! We paid it two hundred and twenty-five dollars for him. Besides the fare down. But he ain't doin' so well, and to give him a good home you can have him for two hundred dollars."

It was on the tip of Dad's tongue to tell him that the dog was really his, but he changed his mind. He reasoned that he was not accustomed to city ways and it might cost several hundred dollars to establish legal title to Kusko. And because he wanted to be square, he figured that perhaps Moe had paid some good money for the dog.

"Two hundred dollars, eh?" he shrilled, "I've seen 'em bring that at a stampede, but there's no stampede around here. I'll give you a hundred dollars, and not a cent more." Moe almost weakened, but at that moment his partner called:

"Moe, you should come by the telephone again yet."

Moe hurried back. His partner grinned. "He's weakenin', Moe. Stick to your price!"

Five minutes later, Dad agreed to pay two hundred dollars. Not because Kusko was worth it, but because he could not bear to see something from his country suffer. And then the partner appeared.

"Vot! Two hundred dollars!" he cried, and proceeded to berate Moe. "Not a cent less than two hundred and fifty dollars."

Dad was no fool. He recognized team work when he saw it.

"I gave you your chance," he snapped, "and you wouldn't take it! I won't give you a thin dime for him now!" He walked out, with Moe hanging to his arm and coming down on the price. A block from the store Dad shook him off. "The first thing to do," said Dad to himself, "is to telephone the telegraph office and have 'em cable Rough Rhodes not to have anything to do with that layout. The next thing is to set down and do some tall thinking. Got to learn 'em a lesson. It won't do no good, but I'm goin' to try it. H'm! Let me think! Ain't it heck when a man ain't got brains?"

And behind, in the hot window, Kusko waited. For the dog the major part of the day was one of torment. He did not mind being chained up, for his kind are used to restraint—to permit them to run at large, invites conflict with other dogs. A badly bitten leg joint renders a dog useless for sled work, hence they are tied up.

There were times in Kusko's new life when his mind dwelt on the old. Days when a dog's hair bristled and was covered with frost; days when he did the thing he loved best—pulled a sled. And the occasional times when he had broken loose and chased a caribou. But the things he never forgot—and this memory was stronger even than the memory of cruel blows—were the voice and contact of the kindly old man who had driven him so many miles. Stray he might from the path of labor that he loved, yet always

the influence of the man sent him back. And in accomplishing this no obstacle was too great to surmount.

There had been a time in his life when other men had blocked this return and harnessed him to their owr sleds. There had been a railroad ride and then Seward, where he had escaped. Even as he was setting about to return to Cold Deck, a chain had been had been slipped through his collar and he had been taken aboard a steamer. Later had come another long rail trip, then the torture of a sunlit window. The window was kept clean, but he caught the scents of other dogs —dogs that had lived briefly and miserably as he was doing, then died.

The tastes that generations of dogs had bred in him came to the surface. The longing for proper food that was ever present. Not scraps from the table, the swill of refuse cans, or cold dishes of mush, but fish was what he desired. He only ate when starvation forced him to, and day by day he found himself growing weaker.

When no one was looking, either Moe or his partner stirred him to life with the whip. A chained dog, pacing like a wolf, attracts more attention than a sick dog sleeping in a window corner.

Long before Dad Simms had entered the store, Kusko had caught the beloved scent. First it had come when he was dreaming. It seemed like a dream until he opened his eyes. Then it grew stronger. Kusko leaped to his feet and forgot the heat. Not given to barking, the dog could only whine as the old man entered the door. Doubt may have entered the man's mind, but not the dog's. He knew! And he waited with growing impatience for a word; a single word that he knew best—Kusko!

It had come! He grew frantic. He did not understand the conversation between the men; nor could he understand why the man ignored him and walked away without looking back. Nor did he attempt to reason. All Kusko knew was that the man in the world he loved best had returned to his life.

Heedless of the heat, the dog paced the window all day; tense, high strung, each moment expecting Dad Simms to return and take him. People watched him with interest. Business increased in the store. The partners were too busy to quarrel. Not at any price would they let him go now. How much he looked like a wolf in his restlessness! His fangs gleamed and his red tongue often protruded as he panted.

Darkness came at last and with it coolness and bright lights. The hours dragged and finally the lights were extinguished. Presently they would take him from the window to a stuffy room in the rear of the building where passing people could not hear him howl.

Moe it was who came this night. He was beaming and rubbing his hands. His partner had begged a pan of scraps from a cheap restaurant across the alley. Moe unsnapped the chain and started. Kusko leaped down from the window and came to a stop opposite the door. The wind, blowing under a crack, brought the beloved scent. The dog grew tense. To him it was a call—a silent call that he wanted to answer. Another puff and it came again. This time it was stronger. With a whine of eagerness, Kusko whirled and charged. Moe was knocked to the floor, the chain slipped through his fingers. Six feet from the window, the dog gathered himself and leaped. The full force of his flying body struck the window full in the center. The glass seemed to bulge outward, then it fell with a crash. The dog struck the sidewalk and rebounded. The scent was strong now. Just ahead! A few people on the

street saw him coming and scattered. One could never tell about a dog that size. A policeman, who had heard the crash, came on the run. He did not see the dog. He was looking for men —the sort who smash windows with bricks.

The chain whipped a man's legs as Kusko rounded the corner. Man and dog went down to the sidewalk. The man kicked his legs free and stood up. All he saw was a flying dog. Kusko saw more, however. There he was, the man he loved, just around the next corner. He saw his leg vanish. Five seconds later he, too, had rounded the corner. He leaped into the man's arms with a rush that almost knocked him down.

Dad wrapped his old arms about the dog's neck. "There, there, boy!" he said, "that's all behind now! We'd better get into this taxi before it's too late. I kinda figured if I passed by just as they had unchained you, you'd do the rest. I got upwind so the scent would be strong, and then let you use your own judgment. Well, you did!"

He dragged the dog into the taxi. "Clear out, young feller," he shouted, "guess you'd better hit for El Monte. Got a friend there named Frank Mull. He's an old-timer, and there's plenty of room for a dog to stretch his legs on Frank's ranch."

For a time, Kusko was content to sit in the car and regard Dad Simms with boundless love, then the inner dog asserted itself. He sniffed at a bundle Dad was carrying. Dad slowly opened it. "Heh! Heh!" he chuckled. "Tie into it, old son, it's dried salmon. Had a heck of a time gettin' it, but there it is."

THE FOREST THAT NEVER WAS

CHARMING as is the idea of a forest preserved in stone, the theory of such a phenomenon occurring near Burns, Oregon, must be discarded in favor of the facts recently ascertained by John W. Bean and Harry E. Wheeler, seniors in the Department of Geology at the University of Oregon.

The students, having made an investigation of the supposed forest, returned with the information that the "trees" were not petrified wood, but rhyolite. This stone, which is a volcanic deposit, has simply assumed the form of grained wood, and has, in some cases, been so acted upon by exposure to all kinds of weather as to become pitted like the bark of trees.

Another theory that Bean and Wheeler have exploded is that certain so-called bones found in this region are those of prehistoric monsters. These "bones," the students say, are simply lava. They are found in deposits of volcanic cinders and ash of the same composition and origin as the rhyolite, and are sometimes found in company with comparatively perfect volcanic "bombs."

The discoverer of one such "bone" called it the "hip joint of an elephant." This, say the investigators, is simply a volcanic bomb. Other such finds have been named variously by their makers as the spines of saurians, leg bones, and other parts of the anatomies of beasts of bygone days.

To use the words of the report: "All of these are simply parts of similar 'bombs' or lava features formed at the time of cooling of the molten material. A careful search through the pits failed to reveal even the slightest sign of organic remains."

The Gun Tamer

By George Owen Baxter

Author of "Tragedy Trail," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

COLONEL MACKAY invites Felipe Consalvo, Mexican fortune hunter, to his ranch. Mrs. Mackay and her daughter, Mary, react differently to their guest. Sheriff Rankin arrives, ostensibly to investigate a rustling. Consalvo's Indian servant, Pedro, is found eavesdropping.

Rankin, riding to town, is overtaken by Consalvo. The two speak frankly and the sheriff declines Consalvo's request for a short immunity. Consalvo returns to the ranch. A note arrives from the sheriff saying he is detained. Fire accidentally destroys the bunk house.

Consalvo saves Mary's dog from the fire and wins popular favor. He realizes that Mrs. Mackay is the person to be reckoned with. The latter prematurely forces an announcement of Felipe's engagement to Mary.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON DANGEROUS GROUND.

IN some natures mental excitement drives people into social intercourse. In others it sends them into the wilderness, and Mrs. Mackay was of the second order. She went hurriedly down to the stable and there found her husband, talking over the merits of a newly broken three-year-old which was wandering around the small pasture near the corral. The colonel took her aside.

"I see that you've taken a better view of things, my dear," said he. "Mary tells me that you've let yourself be persuaded to be sensible. I've had a long talk with both of 'em. The attitude of Felipe is ideal. He seems to have a great respect for me—for us, I mean. And he appreciates what it means to ally himself to the Mackays. There will be no foolishness. I put my foot down at once and let him see, for future reference, so to speak, that there is to be only one head to this house. He has the delightful attitude of the well-bred Mexican. The oldest man in the family carries the undisputed authority. He at once asked my advice. Should he take out citizenship papers? Would his faulty knowledge of English permit that? Of course I told him it was the one thing to do. Everything is to be arranged. Everything! The

affair is going to be perfectly handled!"

She could not help saying: "What a romantic adventure it is, after all! He started out to find his golden treasure, and even if he hasn't located the Seven Lost Cities, he's found his pot of gold, hasn't he?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes," said the colonel. "And when I consider the youth and the good looks and the grace of Felipe, my dear, I imagine that he's just the sort of a Prince Charming who might have stepped out of the fairy tale. And——"

Here he stopped short, stabbed by an uncomfortable suspicion.

"Lydia, was there something ugly in that remark of yours?"

"In mine, dear?" echoed Lydia naïvely. "Why, how should there be?"

The colonel sighed, with suspicion still in the corner of his eye; but, after all, he was much interested in the colt which was under examination. Still there was a shadow upon his brow.

Mrs. Mackay continued to wear the affable smile which made her beloved on the ranch until she had mounted a horse and ridden out of view among the trees. After that, sternly she set the head of her mount into the wind and galloped hard across country, jumping fence and ditch, until she had turned up the valley into the ravine in which it ended.

And all the time that that ride was in progress, she was turning her thoughts swiftly in her mind, trying to find a starting point, a sort of purchase from which she could exert lifting power in the direction which she wanted.

The best thing that occurred to her was to make some sort of a search into the actual past of Don Felipe—locate the lost rancheria of the Consalvos, and determine what had been the actual position of Felipe in regard to his family.

That, however, would take time. But, after all, if she could keep Consalvo from being suspicious, it might be that she could keep him safely on the ranch until her investigations were completed—and if those investigations did not return a most rich yield, then both she and the wise sheriff had been oddly mistaken in their judgment of this youth.

She turned her pony—her mind quite darkened by these reflections—up the side of the ravine, and climbed a dangerous and twisting course to the higher land above. It was a narrow and lofty ridge which commanded a good prospect in every direction except to the north, where the higher mountains rose. All to the south and west and east extended a wilderness, a region of brush traversed by many canyons which ran water only for a few weeks when the snow was melting fast in the higher valleys.

Over that gloomy region she looked, feeling that it was much in tune with her state of mind, where so many cross and devious intentions were springing up every moment, and where there was such a dark thicket of doubt.

And then, as she watched, she saw a tall and ragged figure break out of the jungle and head swiftly across an open stretch, disappearing at once in another small thicket.

Mrs. Mackay stiffened in the saddle, for the man was Pedro, and the body servant of Don Felipe ran with such steadiness and rhythm to his stride that she could not doubt he was bent on some mission of a definite nature. No one entered such bad lands as this for the mere pleasure of a jaunt across country, and certainly no one would perform such a journey on foot and at a run unless there were an important need.

She rode higher up the ridge, and now she had view of the runner again, pressing on steadily, and weaving through the underbrush with an amazing skill.

Nothing suggested itself as an explanation of his goal, but she felt that, somehow, it must have to do with Don Felipe's affairs, and therefore it was her business, distinctly.

Again he disappeared, and again she rode higher up the slope, but this time he was definitely lost. She rode still farther, but there was no further view of him, and at last she turned down from the ridge, entered the canyon, and went back toward the house.

It was late in the morning when she arrived. But Mary was not back; she would not be there with Felipe until lunch time, she had left word.

Mrs. Mackay went to her room and walked nervously up and down, up and down.

She had the desperate sense of obligation pressing upon her, and yet she knew not what to do immediately. Even how to start the investigation of the Consalvos seemed a puzzle to her. There was no detective agency in the town. She knew of the address of none in a more distant place; and if she asked for funds from the colonel to fee the investigators, he was sure to put embarrassing questions.

As he had committed himself to the whole affair of the engagement, of course he would take it as the grossest insult to his intelligence if she showed such suspicions of Mary's husband-to-be!

And then she made her first decision —such a thing as, ordinarily, would have been beyond her wildest dream. She left her room, went down to the patio garden, and tried the gate into Don Felipe's little private domain.

The gate was open, and passing through when she had made sure that no eye watched her, she crossed the little winding paths of the inner garden and pressed against the door.

It was locked.

But there was a window yawning wide. She was no expert climber, but she managed to drag herself up to the sill. There a rending sound stopped her. She had torn her dress squarely across the knee!

Well, it was a small tragedy, but it made her heart thunder, for she felt that even so small a detail as this might serve as a clew against her.

From the window she stared hungrily around the room.

There was not the least detail that could serve to excite any suspicion. Some one had lain on the bed since it was made up in the morning, and on the little bedside table was an ash tray containing a few butts of cigarettes.

She lowered herself to the floor, cautiously, watching where her feet fell, for she made sure that the eye of a lynx would fall on that room before it was many hours older.

There was nothing worthy of observation. A little paper-bound book lay crumpled on the center table. She picked it up and glanced. It was Froissart, and in the old French—a battered and much-thumbed volume. And Mrs. Mackay opened her eyes very wide. It was such a book as one might imagine the young cavalier delighted in, but after all—in French—in the original French of that ancient century!

Decidedly there was much to this youth that would bear careful and patient study.

She was trembling with a greater fear than ever when she went on. In a closet, she found the wardrobe of Don Felipe, but not such a bulging one as one would have suspected from the contents of the three great mule packs which had been driven into the yard of Mackay House and unloaded there.

She opened the second closet, which feminine guests were apt to use as a dressing room, because of its dimensions and the little window that lighted it. There she found two packs, apparently intact since their arrival.

She prodded them with a tentative

foot, and encountered something hard and unyielding as metal.

But what could be in it?

She tried the other, and found, as nearly as she could judge, nothing but cloth under the point where she pressed.

Then, yielding to an impulse that made her crimson with shame, she undid the knot and opened the pack with shaking hands.

Inside, there was nothing at all!

Nothing, at least, of any value. Some ragged blankets of age were wrapped on the outside, and inside there were bricks, wood, cotton waste, and other junk, made up so as to serve for the dimensions and the weight of an ordinary pack.

And Mrs. Mackay looked slowly up, with a fierce and satisfied gleam in her eye. Certainly this excursion had not been for naught!

She folded back the covers of the pack as swiftly and as carefully as she could, and then drew up the cords. As for the making of the knot, she must be sure that it was correctly done, so first she studied the knot of the remaining great bundle, and when she was certain of the way, she made the knot.

After that, she stood up and surveyed the room carefully, to make sure that she had left no telltale signs behind her. But, as she did so, she heard a voice speaking down the hall, dimly—a voice that chilled her blood.

A door opened, and the voice of Don Felipe rang fairly in her ears!

CHAPTER XXIV.

EAGLE AND SNAKE.

MRS. MACKAY, sick at heart, clenched both her hands and strove to think; but she knew that when the tall and slender young Mexican stood before her she would be white as death, with her guilt in her face.

But then the door closed and the voice of Don Felipe sounded in the hall—and the smaller voice of Mary answered gayly in the distance, like the far-off tinkle of a bell.

That instant she made again for the window and scrambled through it, harum-scarum, and landing on the gravel of the path outside, she bolted for the gate of the garden.

Arrived at it, she paused one instant to gather her wits and retake her breath. Then she passed through and swept her glance over the larger patio, but nothing stirred in it except the shower of the fountain, and the swinging tendrils of the climbing vines, with their delicate shadows beneath them.

So she made her way safely to the house, and up the stairs to her room, with no eye to mark her torn dress. Afterward, she could explain it to her maid as a riding accident.

When she was safe again in her own sanctum, she slipped into a chair and, bowing her head in her hands, she went over the details of every move she had made while she was in the room of the Mexican. So far as she remembered, she had not made a single false motion, and unless the hard tiles of the floor betrayed the imprint of her feet, she felt that nothing earthly could detect her presence in that chamber. Then, being assured of this, she permitted herself to draw breath, changed for luncheon, and after a preliminary interview with herself in the mirror, she went calmly down the stairs.

It was a gay luncheon, largely because Mary babbled like a brook, and was full of everything her eye had touched on or her ear had heard during her ride of the morning. For it seemed to be a new and transfigured world to the girl, and all that she had noticed today was noticed, as it were, for the first time.

They had claret, cool from the cellar; claret which the colonel had laid in regardless of expense; and every time the glass of Mary went to her lips, her eyes

sought Don Felipe, and always she received, for an answer, that faint and gentle smile.

Mrs. Mackay looked down to the table once or twice, and had to steady herself by touching the side of her chair with her finger tips. But somehow she got through the ordeal, and afterward, when she was alone with the colonel, he wreathed the room with his cigar smoke and smiled at her through the circlings of the drifts.

"Ideally mated," said the colonel. "I believe, it was a sort of preternatural foresight that came to me when I first met Don Felipe! Instinct, Lydia. I'll think the better of instinct and myself as long as I live!"

"Like *Falstaff,*" murmured Mrs. Mackay, but her voice was not heard. There were things which the colonel hardly could pay attention to, and the voice of his wife was among the first of them.

They were near enough to the land of mañana for siesta to be observed religiously, and so when the Casa Mackay was falling into its midday slumber, Don Felipe retired to his room and, picking up his book on the way, he stretched himself on his bed to read more of the vagaries and the whims and the bloodthirsty madnesses of the citizens of Ghent.

But no sooner had he started to read than he bounded from the bed and whirled about on Pedro.

The latter, though he had a room assigned to him, preferred, commonly, to spend all his spare time in the chamber of his master. He would have slept across the door of Don Felipe's apartment at night, had not the latter strictly forbidden it. Now he sat cross-legged on a strip of matting near the door which led to the garden. In his hand was a very long-stemmed pipe with a great bowl packed to the brim with fuming tobacco, which he would consume to the last morsel before he had his brief siesta. And every mouthful of the smoke would be drawn deeply into his lungs before it was exhaled, the smoke being made to sweep toward the floor and then, slowly, upward toward the ceiling. After which, he would remain for a moment with his head bent back, as though scanning some starry destiny outlined on the plaster above his head. After that, came the next long inhalation, and the same gradual movement repeated.

Don Felipe, starting upright in this fashion, pointed an accusing finger at his servant.

"Pedro!"

The Indian laid the pipe on the floor and folded his arms.

"Señor?" he said.

"You have picked up this book!"

"I, señor?"

"Yes! Don't lie to me about it!"

"I, señor, never say the thing that is not so!"

"The book has been moved," said Don Felipe. "It was not at this page when I laid it down!"

The Indian nodded, and then, rising, he picked up his pipe and glided on noiseless, bare feet into the second and largest closet, beckoning to his master to follow.

When they were within, Pedro pointed to the knot on one of the large packs.

"Untie this, señor!"

Felipe Consalvo obeyed, not pausing to ask questions, for he knew his man of old, and knew Pedro's love of approaching matters obliquely. Direct statements were as poison to the Indian.

"And now this," said Pedro, as the first knot was unraveled.

Don Felipe did as he was told.

"Was there a difference, señor?"

"Why," said Don Felipe, "the first one was tight, and the second was easier. What of that?"

"In all my life," said the Indian, "I never have tied knots in two ways. The

tight knot is mine; the second I did not tie."

Don Felipe paused to stare, at this revelation.

"Then who in the name of mischief did tie it?" he asked.

"This one," said Pedro, and he led the way, quietly, out of the closet and to the window of the room.

There, adhering to the rough plaster of which the sill was formed, was a slender filament of wool.

Don Felipe loosened it and raised it, so that the light shone through it, transparent green.

"One of the *mozas,*" said Don Felipe slowly. "She's been curious and opened our packs. And by heaven, Pedro, she's seen what's in them—or rather, what isn't in them!"

Pedro had returned to his pipe and was smoking it as calmly as before.

"We've been discovered," went on his master in a low and rapid voice. "They've snatched the mask halfway off our faces. Was it a *moza?* Can we find out who it was? And then, how much money will it take to keep her silent?"

"Money will not keep her silent," said Pedro quietly.

"No?"

"It will not, señor."

"Then what will?"

Pedro tilted his head again to blow an inhalation at the ceiling, and as the smoke flattened, with curling edges, against the plaster, he gradually drew his forefinger across his throat.

"Ah!" said Don Felipe. "You know the woman then, Pedro?"

The Indian nodded.

At this, his master sat down on the floor, cross-legged likewise.

"Pedro," said he, "from the day when you saved me from the bear, I've known that you're tangled up with my life and my fate, I have known it as truly, Pedro, as though I heard it in the voice of the Thunder Bird!"

Pedro glanced, startled, over his shoulder. And then, mixing his creeds at random, he rapidly crossed himself.

"I have known," said Don Felipe," that why I sleep soundly at night is because there is a lion near me. And the reason that I can walk without looking over my shoulder is because there is a mountain lion walking at my back. Do you hear me, Pedro?"

The Indian, lifting his brows, closed his eyes, and drew in deeply from the pipe. But by a certain tenseness around his mouth, Don Felipe knew that the man was pleased to the very core of his hard and brutal heart.

"And now, Pedro," he continued, "you have found out the thing which means the most to me, just now, for you have found out the woman who has invaded this room and spied on us. Tell me—is she some one who is likely to tell the colonel what she has seen?"

The Indian nodded.

"I thought as much," said Don Felipe. "Well, if she has reported it already, he'll make a joke of it, perhaps. Call it vanity, eh? I wonder if she's told him?"

He asked his own silent judgment, rather than the Indian. But Pedro shook his head.

"She has not told," said he.

"You know a great deal," said Don Felipe. "You've talked to her, then, since she was in here?"

"No."

"Come!" said Don Felipe. "I don't believe you have the least idea who she is. You're making a great smoke out of a small fire, Pedro."

"I? No, it is not so. But the señora wore a green cloth this morning."

Don Felipe leaped from the floor.

"Oh marvelous gods!" cried he. "It is she again! Pedro, Pedro, I am blind! I see nothing except with your eyes!"

Those eyes, at the moment, glowed with a profound satisfaction, and Pedro

had to look hastily down to the floor to conceal his proud emotion.

His master stood by the garden window.

"Through this," he said, "climbing like a tomboy, and then stealing into this room, and then to the closet—and then actually daring to open the pack—and closing it again with the same knot—and listening for my footstep all the time! Oh, Fates, since such a glorious creature was made, why was she not made of my own age? I knew she was an eagle, Pedro. Now you have shown me that she is a snake as well; she is complete!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A VOICE FROM THE CAVE.

MRS. MACKAY, with eyes half-closed in thought, enumerated to herself the testimony which she had gathered, and though it was of various kinds, still she was not satisfied. In the first place, her guest was a young Mexican adventurer, and his alien race and his condition were both against him. In the second place, he was a person of consummate poise and an actor of the rarest ability and, having these talents, he could, if he wished, excel as a deceiver. In the third place, she was convinced that such deception was in his mind, partly because of what the sheriff had told her concerning the shooting of the gunman, and partly because of her own discovery concerning the empty pack. Moreover, there was the affair of the rescue of Tag, when this pretender to feminine cowardice had played the part of a hero, and played it with such a really nonchalant grace that Mrs. Mackay had not the slightest doubt that he had revealed his actual nature on that occasion.

Yet, when she added up these matters, she saw that there was practically nothing—unless it were the affair of the stuffed pack—which would have appeared as damaging evidence—in the eyes of a jury of twelve good men and true, for instance.

When Mrs. Mackay had come to this conclusion, she did not fail to admit to herself that, really, what she had most against this young man was the strong action of instinct in her. And though she was willing to allow that instinct is a blind and often a foolish judge, yet she could not help trusting in the voice that accused Don Felipe of being, not a black villain, not a murderer or a low scoundrel, but simply a predatory creature who threatened to take from her, by wile, that possession which was of all the world the dearest thing to her.

So she pondered this matter, and instead of throwing up her hands in despair, she looked on the affair as a general looks on a field of battle, seeing his troops driven back in all directions, his last reserves vainly thrown in to stem the rout, and nothing remaining to him except the sheer power of his mind to conceive some counterstroke.

So Mrs. Mackay looked down upon the human snarl which lay in her path, and strove out of her own intelligence to find some way of solving her problem.

The sheriff—if he had been near—might have rendered her vastly vital help. But the sheriff was gone. Had she had the time and the courage, perhaps a further examination of all that was in the chamber of Don Felipe might have revealed to her as much as she needed to know. If she could only find, in the world, one person who ever had known of Consalvo before! Or, indeed, if she could achieve what seemed impossible and draw from Pedro, the great sullen Indian, what he knew about his master.

Now that Pedro was in her thoughts again, she recalled that morning excursion and the intentness of purpose with which the Indian had struck across country, and yet had returned so

promptly to the house, as if he had performed a set errand. What could the errand be which had sent him hunting so resolutely across the countryside? Or was it, indeed, to get in touch with certain confederates who might be held in the background by Don Felipe, ready to second him in some sort of a coup?

The thought made her tremble.

And yet before the afternoon was old, she was in the saddle again and away up the valley.

She went straight to the ravine, and rode up it until she had gained the commanding point where she had sat her horse that morning. From this vantage place she scanned once again the brush through which she had seen Pedro working, and so well had the picture been printed in her thoughts that she could pick out again the exact course he had followed. It led straight from the direction of the house, but pointed, however, merely at the blank wall of the ravine side. Yet, beyond a doubt, the trail of Pedro had led higher up the narrow gorge, winding close under the cliff.

She prepared to ride straight down the precipitous slope into the hollow when she remembered that if her fear, however far-fetched, should prove to have some substance, and if confederates of the Mexican were actually in hiding near by, then the noise of her horse through the thicket would be as ample as the sounding of trumpets to announce her approach. And heaven alone could tell what might come of that! Yet, if she abandoned her horse and trusted herself to her own feet—what then, if they were to come upon her?

She paused a few moments, trembling violently, but once she had set before herself a great goal, she could not hold back from it.

She tethered her horse in a dense grove that stood up like wind-blown hair on the top of the ridge, and when she was certain that she could be seen from no side by any passer-by, she ventured down into the ravine and came almost to the bottom of the slope when her foot dislodged a hundred-pound stone.

She caught at it as it began to roll, but it slipped easily from her grip and, gaining headway, it bounded crashing through the brush below.

Loud, breaking echoes roared up and down the ravine. It seemed to Mrs. Mackay, as she stood transfixed, that heavy artillery was booming and that the reverberations never would die away. But at length silence closed like a wave about her, and all the valley lay waiting at her feet. She turned to climb toward the height above her; at once fear rushed out behind her from the brush and she sank against the slope, half-fainting.

Yet, when she faced the shrubbery once more, nothing stirred, nothing lived beneath her eye except the wind, softly pushing the tops of the bushes this way and that.

By degrees her courage and steadiness returned. And with that, she stood up, resolutely faced the valley, and walked down to the bottom level.

She had not failed, when she was above, to mark the place on the wall toward which the course of Pedro had seemed to be set, but now that she was below, all was so different that she could not be sure of the spot with any certainty. However, she started on again, and winding as close to the wall as the heaps of rocks permitted, she came at last opposite her chosen goal.

There was a sheer face of solid rock before her, and nothing that could indicate the slightest possible place of concealment. For a moment her relief was greater than her disappointment, for she could tell herself, now, that she had been true to her purpose and made an honest and courageous effort.

Then, as she rallied from her first

shock, she could not help silently scoffing at the foolishly romantic fear which she had had.

And suppose that there were scoundrels concealed in this ravine, what could she gain by coming upon them, and how could she hope to observe them without being in turn observed?

At that very moment, she saw in a patch of damp red clay just before her the print of a huge, naked foot—and her blood chilled again.

She tried to reason herself out of her fear, because already she had known that Pedro had come this way, and yet the mark of his foot on the ground seemed to bring back his gigantic shape to stare somberly at her.

Twice she turned back to fly, and twice she checked herself with a mighty effort. The third time, she faced forward and went slowly, almost feeling her way, down the edge of the wall.

For another hundred yards or more she went, and she was about to turn back definitely—for there was no further sign of Pedro's footing—when the ravine at that side went back in a sharp angle and, as she turned it, she saw before her a narrow and pitch-black opening in the rock.

It was both high enough and wide enough to admit a man easily!

This time, be sure, the heart of Lydia Mackay failed her entirely, and all that kept her from rushing headlong back down the ravine was the terrible and nightmare weakness of her knees, which sagged helplessly, and she felt a rush of giddiness, so that she feared for one frightful moment that she would faint.

For so it is often with highly imaginative people, and dangers which they have foreseen are doubly awful when they are realized.

So, for long and deadly moments she remained there, drawing her breath with difficulty and fighting off the blackness which surged in waves across her brain. Then, at last, her mind cleared, and she turned stealthily to make her escape. Behold! The mouth of the cavern had become like a vast, dark eye staring forth behind her and threatening danger. In spite of herself, she could not help hurrying a little, and at her first, hasty step, a small dead branch crackled underfoot—a report like the noise of a gun, in the ear of poor Lydia Mackay.

Then, as fear halted her and made her twist around, both hands clenched, a crown was placed on the horror, for out of the narrow and black entrance of the cave came the low whinny of a horse!

Mrs. Mackay caught up a stone and gripped it until it cut her hands, with a sort of vague and hysterical impulse toward self-defense.

The neigh of the horse ceased; the hollow echoes rolled their last tones toward her, and she was about to shrink back around the edge of the cliff corner and then flee with all her might when she heard the voice of a man, calling loudly from the same quarter: "Who's there?"

And again: "Who's there?" more loudly.

At that, she began to run in earnest and with all her might, but instead of retreating she pressed straight forward, for in that calling voice she had recognized the drawling and distinctly nasal tones of Sheriff Rankin!

CHAPTER XXVI.

WISDOM SPEAKS.

SURELY in all the music of the fabled spheres there never was a sound more welcome than the slow tones of the sheriff, and Lydia Mackay, running headlong, like a girl to meet a lover, passed the dark mouth and stood in the throat of the cave.

It was not black at all there, but suffused with a mild and pleasant twilight, and it was of ample dimensions, so that at one side there was stable room for

the sheriff's favorite mustang which he had been riding on that unlucky morning.

As for the sheriff, he stood up, but he could not advance very easily, for his hands were fastened together and bound with strips of leather, and his feet were both hobbled and tied to a heavy boulder, which he could not possibly drag after him.

When he saw Mrs. Mackay, the sheriff turned a bright crimson.

"Well, ma'am," said he, "you can see how I been investigating Mr. Consalvo, can't you?"

She said not a word, but got out a little knife which she always carried with her when she was riding, for with it she could cut any blossoming twigs or little branches that caught her eye.

Now, with that knife, she freed the sheriff in half a moment. He did not pause, then, to make any explanations, but hastily he saddled his mustang, and then from the wall he took down a pair of big Colts which seemed far too long and massive to be balanced by his slender wrists.

So, armed again and mounted, he led his horse to the mouth of the cave. Only when he had the blue sky above him and freedom before his eyes did the sheriff pause and draw a deep breath.

"Maybe," said the sheriff, "it's the turn of the tide. I dunno. I ain't a prophet. But maybe, Señor Consalvo, I'm gunna be able to make you smart!"

"I don't understand it at all," said Mrs. Mackay. "Oh, I can understand that Consalvo might have met you—but you're living, Mr. Rankin!"

"I don't understand it neither," replied the sheriff. "Nobody; for that matter, could understand anything about him except that he shoots straight and tells lies."

"Will you tell me what happened? And is there danger that they'll be back here—soon?"

"They won't," said the sheriff. "Pedro comes here once a day, late in the morning. What happened, I'll tell you. When I started for town, Consalvo come sashaying after me. When he came up, he started his usual chatter and foolishness. I tried to get the drop on him right there, but he made a fool of me," remarked the sheriff slowly. "And he shot the gun out of my hand."

He touched his forehead, decorated as it was with a black patch surrounded with a wide purple stain.

"But he let you live!" said Mrs. Mackay, apparently overwhelmed by that fact.

"He did," admitted the sheriff. "He let me live, although he knew it was dangerous. I told him that somebody might pass and if they did I sure would be turned loose to plague him. What would he answer?"

"That he was willing to take a gambling chance," said she, "rather than have a murder on his hands."

The sheriff whistled.

"It looks to me," said he, "as though you knew him pretty fair!"

"Of course I do," said she. "I've had to have him in my house all this time, the scoundrel!"

"We'll just be drifting," remarked the sheriff. "You never can quite tell about him. He might've started trailing you, after you left the house to-day——"

She started, but then confidently she shook her head.

"He never could trace me," she said. "I followed a course that led over too many rocks where even horseshoes wouldn't leave a mark."

The sheriff was not convinced, for, he said, it was foolish to judge young Mr. Consalvo by other men. "Where they leave off," he said, "he begins. How do things rest at the ranch?"

"Consalvo is engaged to my daughter," said she, and paused.

The sheriff blinked at her, and then he nodded.

"You couldn't do a thing?"

"I persuaded my husband to agree to the marriage. Everything is happy! Consalvo suspects me, I think, but he doesn't know that I've simply been fighting for time. But if he really feels that he's in danger, he'll whisk Mary away before we have time to draw breath!"

The sheriff nodded again.

"But now," said Mrs. Mackay, "it's too late for him! We'll go straight to the ranch and arrest him—an assault on an officer of the law is enough to put him in prison, I suppose?"

"And who'll put him there?" asked the sheriff calmly.

"Me? I've tried him before, and he's too much for me." He made the admission without apparent shame. "Or am I to get together some of your cowpunchers and tackle him with them? Before I could get them together, he'd have the alarm and be off like a bird. No, that idea wouldn't work."

They fell silent, each turning over many thoughts and finding none that would exactly serve.

"I'm going back to the town," said the sheriff at length. "There I'll run through my papers and discover what I can. And there ain't one chance in ten that I'll miss finding out something about this man. After that, I'll pick up a few good, fighting men and come back. You return to the ranch. You've just been for an outing, Mrs. Mackay. That's all! And be as kind to Consalvo as you can. Some time between dark and morning, *I'll* come back to the house, and the first room that we go to will be Consalvo's. Does that sound good to you?"

"I don't think that I could face him again," said she. "He reads faces as other people read the pages of a book. How could I look into those cunning eyes again, sheriff, without letting him see that something has happened?"

"Try it," advised Rankin. "You take a high-strung sort of a person like yourself, and you always got a lot more strength than you imagine, when the pinch comes. Besides, what is there better to do?"

She pondered only a moment, and then she agreed.

But she said with a certain solemnity before they parted: "I'm going back to keep up the fight single-handed for a time, Mr. Rankin. For though there are so many men on the place, there's no one that I can confide in. There's not one! I'll go there and do what I can, and wait for you, and pray for you!"

The sheriff moistened his dry lips.

Then, "Tell me one thing," she asked. "I can understand why he would have left you alive, but why should we have left your horse with you? That was simple insanity on his part, wasn't it?"

"Insanity? Nope," answered the sheriff. "Softness. When you get a gent as hard as him, he's sure to have soft places. Most of us are just flesh. But when you find a fellow that's chiefly steel, there's always sure to be some unarmored places no tougher than dough. He was leading the pony away to shoot it, when old Midge threw his head around and whinnied for me.

"Mind you, now, there ain't any fondness between Midge and me. He tries to kick my head off when I catch him for saddling, and he unlimbers himself by trying to buck me off first and eat me afterward. But just then, Midge he took it into his head to whinny, and the Mexican, he stopped like somebody turned to stone.

"He hung onto the reins for a minute and kicked at a stone with the toe of his boot. Pretty soon he says: 'This nag loves you, Rankin, I see?'

"I said nothing. I didn't want to lie, even to Consalvo. I didn't have to. His imagination had got to running away with him. Pretty soon he leads Midge back to me.

"'I'm taking a wild and a long chance,' says he, 'in leaving you alive, Rankin. And it makes it worse when I leave the horse with you. To keep two in hiding is a hundred times harder than to keep one. And yonder there's a gulch where the body of that pony could rot away to bones, and nobody but the buzzards ever be any wiser. But, by heaven, I haven't it in my heart! Here's your horse, Rankin. I'll leave him with you!'

"And so he went away, and ever since, when the Indian brought out chuck for me, he had to pack along oats for the horse. He hated that job, did Pedro. And he cussed the horse and he cussed me extra hard, each time. If it had been Pedro that had the handling of the job, me and Midge would have died a long time since. But it was the fault of Consalvo. You see, ma'am, every great crook has his weak sides. Even Napoleon did, they say!"

He mounted Midge, and that faithful horse, as the sheriff had prophesied, began to buck furiously, full of the energy which his long rest had piled up in his body. For five minutes the sheriff was hard put to it to stay in the saddle, but long experience had taught him just what to expect from Midge, and so he kept his seat until the flurry was over. Midge, then, broke into a headlong gallop. A twitch on the reins headed him straight across the hills toward the town and, turning in the saddle, the sheriff took off his hat and waved it toward Mrs. Mackay.

Instantly she turned and hurried back toward the place where she had left her own horse on the ridge, for she feared to be left behind where the silence of that narrow gulch once again might sweep over her.

Up the steep wall she climbed—a far different task from the mere descent—and so she gained the top at last and went gasping for breath toward the dense little grove which rose above it. Into the center of it she passed and there halted with a shock of ice striking through brain and body. For her horse was not there!

CHAPTER XXVII.

FROM THE MOUTH OF FOLLY.

THE disappearance of the horse lifted the whole matter out of the sphere of reality and made it as dreadful as some horror from a fairy tale. Lydia looked wildly around her at the tall, rough trunks of the trees, and at the great wrists of the roots which projected, here and there, from the ground; and in that moment of terror she regarded the brilliant streak of a bluejay that flew rapidly across an opening in the treetops. They were birds of ill-omen, she had heard since she came West!

She was afraid to leave the group of trees for fear lest whoever had removed her horse would now be able to see her fleeing across the open; she was afraid to remain in the shelter of the boughs in the greater fear lest he should return and find her there.

And she thought, first of all, of climbing high into one of the trees and hiding herself as well as she could there. But a second thought told her that the foliage was too thin and open. There would be little chance of protection, here, from such a keen eye as that of Don Felipe!

When she had made that point in her mind, she went cautiously forward toward the edge of the tree circle, and there she hung in doubt for a moment. If she ventured forward, some watcher instantly might see her. Then what was her hope of escape?

Now the sun was dropping rapidly in the West, and every little knoll lay with its long, thickening shadow beside it. If she could gain a slight hollow not far before her, into that she could drop, and lying flat, raise her head to

survey the dangers that might lie around her.

She had taken a step out into the open when she saw a head and shoulders loom on the verge of the ridge, where it showed in bold outline against the sky; and Mrs. Mackay leaped back to shelter, biting her lips to restrain the outcry of terror.

It was the giant Indian, Pedro, coming at a swift pace, leaning forward as though to diminish his bulk in case some eye were spying. He swayed a little from side to side with the strength of his running, and his face seemed to Mrs. Mackay more terrible than anything she ever had seen in her life, for there was the intelligence of a man and the ferocity of a brute in it.

Straight toward her he came, and she knew that flight never could keep her from him. She thought first of screaming; but then she realized that Rankin was far, far away, now, and going toward the town with all the strength of his mustang's gallop.

So she took out again the little knife which, already, had done one great task that day, and she held it in a firm hand. She was amazed at herself, for though she was frightened more than ever she had been frightened before, her mind remained cold and steady; and through the drift of greenery before her she watched the Indian approach.

Then, as he drew closer, the ghost of a hope came to her that, after all, he had not marked her, for his course did not point so accurately at the spot where she was standing.

A moment more, and he had entered the circle of the trees. There was no crashing of the underbrush; there was no thudding of feet and no crackling of dead pine needles, but like a shadow he went past her not three yards away.

She was safe for that instant, then, beyond the best of her dreams; and she slipped out into the open and began to run as softly and swiftly as she could. If ever luck brought her safely through this terror, never would high heels appear on her shoes thereafter!

The direction she chose was the one from which she had seen Pedro approach, for in that way she hoped to come upon her horse and safe means of flight.

Glance behind her, she dared not, for though she felt that she had run as swiftly and as softly as a shadow, still the ear of the Indian might have heard! But when she came to the very verge of the high ground, a cold fear gripped her and made her jerk her head about.

There was Pedro! If he had run swiftly before, he came at her now like a thunderbolt, and she could see the gleaming whites of his eyes as he rolled them in his fury and in his effort.

Mrs. Mackay screamed and flung herself down the slope before her, gained the brush, and, venturing another glance behind, saw Pedro towering like a giant into the sky. Once more her throat went numb with her cry, and facing forward, she fled with a blind speed.

Ah, no, there was one thing which could bring back sense to her sight, and that was the form of her horse, the reins thrown over its head, and now looking up cheerfully, ears pricked, to watch her race, still gathering in his last bite of grass. One of Pedro's mules stood near by, saddled and bridled, and so she knew how he had been able to follow so swiftly after her.

Toward her horse she flung herself, grasped the pommel, and flung herself upward and to the side until she found herself in the saddle. There was no need to speak to her mount or touch him with a whip. He was flying before she was well seated in the saddle.

Behind her was the dark form of Pedro, springing closer. She dared not glance at it, but leaned forward to escape the reaching hand; while Pedro's mule, equally alarmed, darted away with

a squeal and a whinny, stepped on his reins, broke them short, and then kept on like a wild, mad thing.

Up the ravine she sped like an arrow; when she looked back once more, there was no sign of Pedro. Then she remembered that during all this adventure the Indian had not uttered a sound, and for some reason that thought made her sick with a more mortal dread than ever.

However, she managed to check her horse, and gathered the reins over his head. Then she went on steadily, riding neither hard nor fast, but with her mind working hard.

For she realized now that the die had been cast and this trouble was taken out of her guidance almost entirely.

Pedro would catch his mule, no doubt, and then go to the cave to make sure that his prisoner was well. When he found the sheriff gone, he would come like a homing pigeon for his master. And then?

She caught her breath and set her teeth.

Whatever Don Felipe did, at that moment, he would do quickly, and she had no doubt that, in some manner, he would be able to turn Mary around his finger.

There was only one slender hope, and that was that Pedro would be so delayed in the catching of his mule that before he reached the house the sheriff would have come and settled everything with one grasp of the iron hand of the law.

So she thought, and hurried her horse homeward. There was no need to speed the sheriff on his way. Already, beyond a doubt, he was feverishly turning his records to find the notice that he wanted of a handsome young Mexican who spoke little English, who rode a splendid horse, and who was cleverness incarnate.

If that record proved to be at hand, then the case was made out letter perfect, and Don Felipe's career in the house of the Mackays was drawn to a close.

The house loomed before her at last. She drew closer, eying all its details; and took heed, as she swept nearer, that her impetuous husband already had put a gang to work trenching foundations for the new bunk house, which was to rise so splendidly as to be worthy of a nobler name. Little mark had she made upon the big place since her first coming. All was the work of the colonel, and she was sure of only one thing—that Mary was hers, first of all, and that this one treasure now was imperilled.

She gave her horse to a half-breed stableboy and then walked lightly to the big house.

For she had no sense of fatigue. She felt, instead, an inexhaustible strength to do the work which lay before her.

The instant that she entered the patio, she encountered Don Felipe, strolling idly here and there—a blue and a red flower in his hand, and his eye wandering to find an appropriate third.

A little bouquet for Mary, no doubt!

He bowed low to Mrs. Mackay. He would assist her into the house. He would carry the hat which she was swinging in her hand. He would carry her riding whip.

No, she wanted no help.

So he was left behind in the patio, but she was conscious, as she entered the house, that his last gaze had been fixed most intently on her or on the ground just behind her.

She, in the shadow of the hall, looked downward, and she saw that both her heels were deeply stained by the red clay into which she had stepped in the ravine.

It caused her an instant's shock. But, after all, there must be hundreds of places where there was red clay. Certainly even the brilliant brain of Don Felipe would not be able to de-

duce anything damaging from that! Yet she was more subdued and more desperate as she went up to her room.

The colonel saw her pass from his study, where the door was open. She had a trapped sensation when she heard him sing out:

"Lydia! Oh, Lydia! Come in here a moment, will you, my dear?"

She stood helplessly before him.

"I've a grander idea than ever. Look here—you see it? A fine sweep of lawn all across the front of the patio, with two splendidly curving paths for the men to ride in and out by. I'll transplant a couple of strong, young trees. Make that lawn look a century older inside of two years. By gad, Lydia, it will round off the whole place! What do you think?"

She smiled. It was all he wished. And so she was allowed to go free to her own chamber.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A MAN TRANSFIXED.

WHEN the sheriff reached the town, he went straight to his office. Half a dozen times he was hailed from the edges of the street, and he waved his hand idly in returning the greetings. But his heart was before him in the midst of the records of his office.

When he got to the little veranda in front of his office, he found there four men, seated on two chairs and two boxes tilted back against the wall. One was his old deputy and caretaker; the remaining three were strangers. Of these one stepped forward to him.

"You're Sheriff Rankin?"

"I am."

"Name is Morgan. Can I have five minutes of your time, sheriff?"

"Morgan," said the sheriff, "I'd like fine to sit and have a talk with you, but I'm mighty busy."

He stepped on to the door, but there his shoulder was tapped.

"So am I," said Morgan. "Mighty busy, I mean!"

The sheriff passed off this interruption with a smile and went on into his room.

There, in an instant, he had his files open and was spreading them on the desk when there was an abrupt, loud knock at his door and another of the three strangers entered.

"Afternoon, Rankin," said he. "My name is Lucas. Can I talk to you a minute?"

"Lucas," said the sheriff, "I'd enjoy to talk to you, but I've got a mighty important job on my hands, just now. Can't see you now."

He advanced on Lucas, and the latter retreated through the door, protesting still. "My business is tolerable important."

"Mine is life and death," said the sheriff.

And he closed and locked the door.

He was irritated by these two interruptions, for, at a point when he had to count seconds, it seemed as though there were a conspiracy to steal his time.

He heard the voice of his deputy calling through the door: "Mrs. Mackay, she come asking for you the other day, sheriff."

"Keep still, will you," snapped the sheriff. "And never mind Mrs. Mackay."

He began to delve into his files.

They were neatly and alphabetically arranged, with the pictures and the records and the detailed descriptions of hundreds and hundreds of criminals of all sorts, not only those who actually had appeared in his own or adjacent territory, but also of others who were of what might be called the migratory type of criminal—yeggs and pushers of the queer and others who were apt to wander here and there across the country.

The sheriff began at "A," and half

way through that letter he looked at his watch and groaned.

Even by this time, who could tell what was happening at the Mackay place?

He wished now, as he wished before many times, that there had been some efficient way of filing his material other than alphabetically. Often he had thought that it could be arranged by the class of crook—yeggs, gunmen, gamblers, sneak thieves, confidence men, and so forth; and again he had vowed that one day he would undertake the arrangement according to age—men between fifteen and twenty, twenty and twenty-five, and so on. To-day, if he could have made two or three broad divisions, of blond and dark criminals, and young and old, then he might have made better progress, but as it was, he was like a hunter for information with the whole of a vast library before him and only an hour at his disposal.

When he had come to this conclusion, and realized that only patience would help him, he set his teeth and settled grimly to his task. He decided that he would do what he could, and if he failed to find any clew within a few hours, then he would simply gather some helpers and ride straight out to the ranch of the Mackays.

So time began to pass swiftly, with terrible smoothness, slipping away from beneath his fingers, so to speak.

Suddenly some one cleared his throat at the open window, and the sheriff glanced sidewise, scowling, a packet of papers in either hand.

It was the third of the strangers.

"Excuse me, sheriff," said he, "my name is Lodge!"

"It ain't," snapped the sheriff, and dropping one sheaf of papers, he pointed with a stiff arm at the other. "It ain't Lodge. It's Truman—Mr. Bert Truman. What d'you want with me here?"

The beetling brows of Mr. Truman gathered together. But then he made himself smile.

"You know about me, old-timer?" he said, shrugging his heavy shoulders.

"I know you're a gunman, Truman, and that you cracked the safe of the First National at Lorington, and—I could tell you a lot more about yourself, but I ain't got the time."

"I've done my stretch and taken my medicine," said Truman. "Nobody has got anything on me now!"

"All right," remarked the sheriff angrily. "Maybe you're all right now, but you won't be for long if you keep right on bothering me. Get out, Truman, and leave me alone!"

He turned back to his work.

He had only reached "D!"

Then he was aware that a shadow still hung in the window. He set his teeth, glanced sidewise, and there was Truman still.

"Now what in——" began the sheriff.

"Speakin' of life and death," said Truman, "I would like to say——"

"Will you get out of that window?" roared the sheriff. "Or do I have to slam it in your flat face?"

Mr. Truman blinked a little, and his black eyes glittered.

"Speakin' of life and death," he said, "I would like to tell you that you would be doin' me a good turn if you could tell me where there's a black-haired, blue-eyed skunk in this part of the world that I'm lookin' for!"

"Shut up!" bellowed the sheriff, and half rose from his chair.

Truman slunk from sight, and the sheriff returned to his task.

The veins were beginning to stand out on his forehead now, and his breath came and went rapidly as though he were straining forward in a race. A race it was, and against him was the splendid and ruthless talent of the young Mexican. Then, in the middle of the "F's" he was aware once more

of a shadow hanging in the window and regarding him.

He turned; and there, hardly credible to his rage, was Mr. Lucas, sun-withered, blond, with a smile upon his lips that was really no smile at all.

"Sheriff Rankin," said he, "I dunno what you're doing, but I got an idea that the three of us have got something just as important on our hands. We're looking for a gent who——"

"Will you be quiet!" shouted the sheriff. "I'm gunna shoot up the whole gang of you!"

And he snatched up his revolver.

Mr. Lucas glided from the window, and the sheriff sat down again.

His nerves were jumping, however. Outside his office windows the shadows of the trees along the street were swarming, and the light was diminishing fast. It seemed to the sheriff as if he had entered a race against nature and its shadows. And they were winning!

For, not long after dark, when the Mackay household met at the supper table, matters would be drawing to a crisis. Then the Mexican and Mrs. Mackay would sit close to one another, and if there were a great secret in her eyes, what could keep that serene youth from guessing at its nature?

It seemed to the sheriff that he could hear the rather loud voice of the colonel aimlessly dominating all the conversation, all the thoughts of others except his delicate and indomitable wife, and the Mexican.

And then—no, it was a thing to be imagined but never to be realized—another shadow hung in his window. He turned his head by inches away from the "L's" which he was wading through at that moment. He saw that evening was upon him, and that was one reason that his eyes were beginning to ache, but he also saw that in the window were the head and the shoulders of Mr. Morgan.

"Sheriff," began Morgan.

"Out!" yelled the sheriff, and swung up his gun.

Morgan flinched, but then he grasped the ledge of the window with both hands and steadied himself in that position.

"Sheriff," said he, "sure as shooting the gent that we want is in your county, and if you can steer us to him, it'd be a grand saving to us and to the law, too. Because if we want him, so do you. You got to!"

"Why, you fool——" began the sheriff.

"There's ten sheriffs that want him!" pleaded Morgan. "For Pete's sake give us a steer, will you?"

The sheriff wiped his brow.

And the other seemed to take that gesture as one of resignation for he began to pour out the words rapidly.

"Black hair and blue eyes," said he, "and young and good-looking. Almost like a pretty woman, he is. Only he ain't. Skinny-looking, pretty near; only he's stronger than a mule—rides a horse——"

"That's queer," said the sheriff, wild with sarcasm. "Actually rides a horse, does he? That ought to locate him for you!"

"Rides the grandest looking horse you ever saw—not too big—but it can run all day like a bullet flyin'."

"Darn the horse—darn him—darn you!" said the sheriff inclusively.

But Morgan persisted desperately: "And he's got a big hulk of an Indian along with him——"

The sheriff heard, and he rose slowly and stiffly from his chair, a man transfixed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FOUR ON THE TRAIL.

TO the sheriff it was as with some hardy mariner who, having set his course by a known star and for a known desert island, comes instead upon an

uncharted land of beauty and delight. He could merely murmur: "Come in. All three of you come in!"

Hastily he unlocked the door, and the three men trooped in, relief and excitement in their faces.

They stood against the wall, their hats in their hands, for the sheriff was a known man, and all stood in awe of him and of his reputation. Yet it seemed to Rankin that never in his life had he faced three grimmer specimens of humanity. Eyes like hawks, with mighty shoulders, gaunt of belly and hip, they had all the air of warriors, and warriors he guessed them to be.

"You know a gent," said the sheriff, "with a big bulk of an Indian, do you, tacking along with him?"

"We do," they said in chorus.

"You, Morgan; what might this gent, this Indian, be like?"

"If you was to take a heavyweight pug," said Morgan, "and then dip him in copper-colored paint, he'd do pretty well for a twin to this here Indian, if he'd had his nose bashed in."

It was a rough but most ready description of Pedro, and the sheriff could not help smiling with joy.

"You got something against this bird that has the Indian, Morgan?" he asked.

"Against him?" said Morgan. "Aw, nothing much, except that I had a five-thousand stake, and I was all set pretty to quit the rough stuff and go straight the rest of me days. And then I sit in at a poker game and this gent takes a chair at the same table with me. And we clean out the rest of the three——"

His eyes gleamed faintly, as he recollected.

"And then," said he, "we had a little quiet game of blackjack——"

"I hear that you're an expert, sort of, at that game?" said the sheriff.

"I am, am I?" said the other. And he began to stare at Rankin: "Say, Rankin, d'you know everything about *everybody?*"

"Not about the gent that has the Indian," smiled the sheriff. "But I expect to find out something about him now! Go on. What happened then?"

"I am pretty good," agreed Morgan. "And I can handle the cards. I ain't a fool! Well, I played with him, and I got two thousand cold off of him. After that, I pushed the betting up pretty high, because I wanted to clean out the sucker as fast as possible—but the luck seemed to turn. And all on one deal of him, I was cleaned out to the last penny. Suddenly, I seen that I was playin' against a master crook, and I reached for my gun!"

"It's all right," said the sheriff, nodding and sighing. "Where did the bullet hit you?"

Morgan opened eyes which had been half shut in his effort of memory.

"It was no bullet at all that hit me," he answered. "It was a bunch of fives that he hung on the point of me jaw. Who would've thought it? He looked like a girl, pretty near, and yet I felt as though I'd been clubbed with a joint of lead pipe. There's still an ache in me jaw when I bite into something hard. And I hope that the ache never leaves me, till I meet up with him again and finish the fight that he started then!"

The sheriff paused, before he continued his inquiry, considering Mr. Morgan and his bitter complaint.

"Well, Lucas, what you got against him?" he continued.

"I was up in Butte," said Lucas tersely, "when I run into this bird with the Indian. There was a little job on hand." Here he looked the sheriff defiantly straight in the eye.

"What was it, Lucas?" asked the sheriff. "What you say to me here is as if you said it to a dead man. And if the man you're after is the man that I want, I'll be your friend for life if you can help me to get him!"

"Well," said Lucas, "I dunno that I mind telling you, then. The job was

the cracking of a little safe. While some of us was planning the job and the get-away, we seen this pair floating around the town pretty gay. But we thought nothing about them. We done our job, and a good clean one it was, and we come away, with twenty-five thousand between the four of us. But as we was getting started, this gent stands up before us out of the darkness with a pair of gats. Two of the boys he got through the legs, or somewheres. I seen it was no use, because when I went for my gat it stuck in my coat lining and jerked out of my hand. So I held up my hands and let him go through me. Every cent of that coin he got away with, sheriff, and then the two that he had dropped was grabbed by the cops and soaked. Goodness knows how many years for each of them, and both of them pals of mine! Would that make you take a skunk's trail, I ask you?"

"It would," agreed the sheriff rather slowly. "There's two of you that have lost money to this here pirate. And what about you, me son?"

The third member of the party said in a slow, rather hoarse voice: "I was fixed pretty in Chihuahua. I had everything all laid out for the marrying of a swell little Mex girl, y'understand. Her old man had so much coin that he didn't know what to do with his income. I figgered that I could've helped him a good deal. So I started working on the girl, and she was pretty reasonable. She hadn't happened to see many of my kind, and everything was about set, including the marriage date. And then this baby-eyed wolf come in between the pair of us. It took him five minutes to make that girl pretty dizzy. After that, she couldn't see me inside of ten miles for a limit. My game was spoiled. I'd wasted six months going straight, and I had to pack up. But I swore that when I packed I'd never stop traveling until I lined up this——"

He relapsed into a terrible strain of profanity which lasted for some minutes, and finally he ceased, fairly frothing at the lips.

To this the sheriff had listened with the utmost attention:

"And what did he get out of the girl?" he asked.

"She was his quick ticket into her old man's *casa*," said the other.

He really wasn't after her, but what he done to her old man was plenty. He got thousands out of him, and then he blew the camp. But what good did that do me? The girl went to grieving for him, and afterward to hating him and all other men, including me. That was the point!"

"Well," said the sheriff, "no matter how, you've all been done by him. How long have you been on his trail?"

"The shortest time is Lucas," said Morgan, "and he's been hanging on for pretty near six months."

"And you all want him dead?"

"Dead would about suit us."

"Well, then, I would say that I have your man located——"

"Ah," cried Lucas, "if you mean that, sheriff——"

"Except," said the sheriff, "that his hair is yaller like a kid's, and not black at all!"

There was general consternation at this announcement.

"But," went on the sheriff, "he fits in with everything else. He's kind of soft and sappy-looking. He's fine-looking, pretty near like a girl. He looks weak and he's as strong as a mule. He can handle a gun like tamed chain lightning——"

"Aye," broke in Lucas with bitter emphasis.

"And he's afraid of nothing on this green earth!"

"That's him," they chorused.

"Besides, he has along with him an Indian that's a ringer for the one that you talk about."

"It's him!" they cried in one voice.

"Now," said the sheriff, "I figure that luck has sent you to me, the three of you. I'll tell you, boys, that this man has made a worse and more shameful fool of me than he has of any of the three of you. And if there's a chance to make his arrest, now I can do it for something more than the trick that he played on me!"

"Were you waiting for causes for an arrest, sheriff?" asked Morgan, amazed, "and yet he'd done a trick on you?"

"He could have killed me," admitted the sheriff frankly. "He could have finished me off, and he didn't. But after that, how could I arrest him for a thing that he might have fixed quiet and safe for himself by putting a bullet through my head?"

The three stared at the sheriff and then at one another, as though this were a type of conscience such as they could not quite comprehend.

"The point is," said the sheriff, "that now I know enough to arrest him and put him where he'll keep, and while he's in keeping, if I don't find enough more evidence against him to keep three men in prison for a lifetime, then he's not what I take him to be. As for the hair—that's the sticking point! He wouldn't be the first man in the world to put on a wig. Boys, I got to make extra sure, We've got to get to the place where he is, and then one of the three of you has got to have a look at him and tell me if that's the man that you mean. And if it is, we'll have out four guns and try to argue the point with him—because, mind you, it'll mean fighting. Y'understand all that?"

There was no answer, except a murmur of savage agreement from Morgan, and Lucas was heard whispering softly to himself:

"I'm gunna bash a couple of bullets through the fine-looking mug of him! I'll fix him so's he'll bust no more hearts, livin' or dead, the buzzards take what's left of him!"

"Have you three good horses?" asked the sheriff.

"Three of the best that ever stepped, and all of 'em near busting for the lack of work, they been waiting here and eating grain so long, while we hoped for you to come back, Rankin!"

"We're off, then," said the sheriff.

He added, as he stood by the office door: "Heaven be good to the souls of some of us, but I figure that more than one man is gunna die to-night, boys!"

"Whist!" said Morgan. "Leave the undertaker to be the mourner, will you?"

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

ONE USE FOR WOOD IN WASHINGTON

MANY novel uses for wood have been recognized from time to time in the history of the industry. But a wedding in which the chief participants wore wooden garments has, so far, been a rarity reserved for the State of Washington. At Hoquiam recently, Gertrude Ohman and Wade Roland, dressed in spruce veneer garments, were married by a minister who was similarly adorned. The ceremony was performed on a log boom in open air. The wooden garments offered their difficulties in the way of adjustment. However, they were slipped over the contracting parties, leaving holes for their arms that hands might be joined, while apertures were made for eyes and lips.

The guests threw sawdust instead of rice, and the honeymoon began on a raft of logs floating down Gray's River. Bride and groom are employees of a mill at Hoquiam.

Two Great Big Guns

By Ray Humphreys—

Author of "Shorty and the Dumb Belle," etc.

AN alert, sleek, well-dressed, Mexican youth was Roberto Aranda. He spoke English fluently. He let it be known, when he first reached Monte Vista, that he was a member of one of the oldest and most respected families of Mexico. He had just finished college, he said, and he was spending a year "knocking around" through the States picking up American business ways before returning to his motherland. He had money—and his dollars helped vouch for him. And when he made an official call, that spring morning, on Sheriff Joe Cook in the latter's office, the old sheriff was pleased.

"Glad to meet yuh, Señor Aranda!" boomed Sheriff Cook, who made it a political point to be courteous to all good Mexicans, "an' I wishes to interduce my deputy—Mr. 'Shorty' McKay!"

"Oh, charmed!" exclaimed Aranda, extending a hand.

"Uh-huh!" grunted Shorty, laying down his book, "Modern Sleuthing," reluctantly, and getting to his feet. He gave the smiling Mexican youth a flabby handshake, while Sheriff Cook scowled. But the sheriff said nothing to Shorty—just then.

"An' what kin we do fer yuh, Señor Aranda?" asked Cook.

"Ah, it is with timidity that I mention!" admitted the handsome Aranda, smiling. "But you see, Señor Sheriff, I am to return soon to Mexico and there will take up an important post with the Federal government—with the secret service there, if you please—as an investigator, or, as you might say here—a detective."

Shorty looked up suddenly from his book. He favored the Mexican youth with a surprised stare. The Mexican smiled.

"Ah, that is confidential, of course!" he hastened to explain. "An' now to get down to brass nails, as you say—I heard in Denver, Señor Sheriff, that you were acknowledged the smartest sheriff in all Colorado. They said there

—'Go, Aranda, you can learn some clever tricks of the trade from the Señor Cook'—so—I come!"

Sheriff Cook was flushing at the compliment. He sighed and offered the Mexican a fat, tinfoil-wrapped cigar.

"Waal, Aranda," he said, trying to say it in an offhand manner, "I has—kinda—been able to ketch a lot o' crooks fer the Denver police department; perhaps they are too generous in sayin' I am the smartest sheriff in Colorado—Colorado is a big State, Aranda—but I always tries to do my best, keeps my eyes open at all times, smokes moderately, don't befog my brain with coffee——"

"Ho-hum!" cut in Shorty, yawning, "it's a warm day."

Señor Aranda and Sheriff Cook looked at Shorty, but even as they watched Shorty sank his chin on his chest, relaxed slowly, and shortly emitted a low but energetic snore.

"Don't mind him," said the sheriff, contemptuously. "Now, go on, Aranda—what was yuh gettin' at?"

"I should have the nerve to ask to be made a deputy," said Señor Aranda, hopefully, "where I can be in close touch with the master mind, watching it function."

Sheriff Cook was astonished at the request.

"I kin only hire one deputy," he began.

"I wish not to be paid!"

"Oh—jus' a volunteer deputy, eh?"

"I believe that is the word—a temporary deputy—an honorary deputy, if I may suggest," purred Aranda softly.

Sheriff Cook considered the proposition. He was flattered by the offer. He had been observing Aranda ever since the youth entered the office and the fellow had made a good impression. He was clean. He was neat. He was bright. He was courteous. He had plenty of personality. His appointment as an honorary deputy sheriff might mean more votes from the Mexican element in the fall elections.

"How long yuh aim to stay?" asked the sheriff.

"Alas! but a short time," said Aranda.

"Yuh got any recommendations?" asked Cook. "Not that I really want 'em, Aranda, but it's customary—kain't appoint everybody a deputy—got to have a line on them as I does."

"Ah!" said Señor Aranda, and he pulled out several documents and handed them to the sheriff. The sheriff took them, unfolded them, and saw great gold seals on them. He glanced at them casually, saw they were in Spanish, and then handed them back to the waiting Aranda. The sheriff's brief inspection of the youth's recommendations had impressed him.

"Fine, Aranda," he said, "I guess I kin fix yuh up!"

And that was the way Señor Roberto Aranda, scion of one of Mexico's oldest and most respected families, became a deputy sheriff of Monte Vista, Colorado. The sheriff rummaged around in a drawer of his desk and found an old silver badge, marked "deputy," a relic of a past régime. He polished it hastily on his sleeve and then pinned it on Aranda's vest himself. The parting of the sheriff and the new honorary deputy was cordial. Aranda said he would return after lunch. That was fine. Then Sheriff Cook went over and kicked the chair from under Shorty's resting feet. Down came the sleeping Shorty's boots.

"Is—breakfust—ready?" murmured Shorty, drowsily.

"I'll breakfast yuh, yuh danged impudent pup," roared the sheriff angrily, "insultin' visitors to this office an' indicatin' yuhr idears about 'em by gruntin' on bein' introduced, shakin' hands like a Ute Injun, an' then goin' to sleep in their presence!"

"No man," said Shorty, opening his eyes, "who dresses in a velvet jacket

trimmed with braid, an' wears a hat, belt, an' chaps like that bird, is worth speakin' to civil!"

"Is that so?"

"Yup!"

"Waal, yup or no yup," said the sheriff complacently, "I've just named him a honorary deputy sheriff. He's goin' to be a big gun in the Mexican secret service, as yuh heard him say, an' he's come to the right place to learn the finer points o' the game."

Shorty grunted and made a sour face.

"He fed yuh a lotta bologna an' yuh appointed him!"

"I'm always thinkin' two steps ahead o' yuh, Shorty!" said Sheriff Cook. "I appointed him not because o' his compliments—entirely—but because I kinda figgered that he might help us solve them—them road agent robberies down in Tejon district."

"Huh!" said Shorty, and slammed out of the office.

Deputy Roberto Aranda entered into his new duties with a vigor and zest that pleased Sheriff Cook, but he didn't help, after all, to solve the series of holdups in the Tejon district, twenty miles southwest of Monte Vista. The holdups went right on, and the protests from the Mexican residents of the district continued to pour in on Sheriff Cook, much to his chagrin. The sheriff and Shorty had tried hard enough for weeks to nab the robber, but had failed. And they had failed miserably. They had been given a fair description of the robber, who worked alone, and who made a practice of riding the Tejon district trails and holding up wayfarers. He held up only Mexicans—after all, there wasn't any one but Mexicans in that district—and his victims all swore, later, that sad as it was to say so, the robber was a Mexican, too. He rode a bay horse, they said, with fancy trappings. But the sheriff and Shorty had failed to locate robber, horse, or trappings.

And then Deputy Roberto Aranda became one of the fingers on the arm of the law in Monte Vista. Sheriff Cook sent him down to the Tejon to investigate, but the robberies went merrily along. Later, the sheriff and Shorty and Aranda all went down to the district and set traps of all kinds to catch the cunning robber—and failed utterly. Aranda rode the roads as a decoy, followed by Cook and Shorty, in the hope that the robber would hold him up and the two men trailing behind could cut him down with gunfire. No luck! The country was searched thoroughly. Still no luck! And yet the robberies continued. No one had ever seen the robber unmasked, but Perfecto Silva, the latest victim, had given the three officers the best description yet obtained.

"He is yuhr height, señor!" said Silva, pointing to Honorary Deputy Aranda, "an' about yuhr build. And, by the good Saint Pedro, the patron of my mother's uncle, he rides a hoss—a bay hoss—that is an image o' yuhrs, sir!"

"Star in forehead?" asked Shorty, speaking up.

"*Si*—even to the star!"

"One white stockin' on the left front laig?"

"*Si*—even to that, I swear!"

"Surely you are not insinuating that it is my horse this bandit is using?" sputtered Aranda, turning on Shorty, and Shorty had grinned maliciously. There was bad blood between the two deputies, and Sheriff Cook had his hands full keeping peace between them. He cut in on the argument now abruptly, right to the point.

"What time were yuh held up yesterday, Silva?"

"At sharp eleven in the mawnin', Señor Cook!"

"Waal," said Sheriff Cook gruffly, "at sharp eleven in the mawnin' yesterday Deputy Aranda here was with Shorty an' me in the town o' Shoshone, an' his

hoss was with him. So that kinda settles all the smoke on the horizon, don't it?"

"*Si!*" said Silva.

"Ah!" said Aranda.

"Ho-hum!" said Shorty. "Who said they was any smoke?"

And so the search for the lone horseman continued, quite unsuccessfully. The Mexican ranchers of the Tejon were rightly indignant. They couldn't understand why Sheriff Cook and Shorty couldn't remain right in the district until the robber was trailed to earth. They didn't understand that the sheriff's office in Monte Vista had other matters to attend to—that district court was on, that the sheriff and Shorty were witnesses in a number of cases; that subpœnas had to be served; that prisoners had to be brought into court and guarded and later jailed, or released, with all due formalities; that new business was always cropping up, and some of it was important. The officers couldn't spend all their time in the Tejon, and as for leaving Honorary Deputy Sheriff Aranda there—well, they might have, had not Aranda objected.

"These peon ranchers here do not like me," he protested to Sheriff Cook, "they recognize that I am of the upper class. Why, that half-Indian, Silva, almost accused me of being the robber!"

"Nonsense!" said Sheriff Cook.

"But I do not care to remain here alone," went on Aranda. "I learn more with you in Monte Vista—anyway, I am not experienced enough to catch the Tejon robber with my own hands!"

"Now, yuh're talkin'!" exclaimed Shorty.

So the three officers went back to Monte Vista, and almost immediately the lone horseman of the Tejon had a field day. He held up Albino Aca and Parocinio Rael and Juan Rivera, all prominent ranchers, in one morning. That afternoon he robbed Severo Encinias and Anotia Montoya and Longino Lopez and Francisco Ramirez. And what a howl went up! The sheriff sent Aranda back, but Aranda remained but two days. The day he returned to Monte Vista the lone rider of Tejon broke loose again and held up five men. The sheriff was in a rage, Shorty appeared highly indifferent, and Aranda was of no value. The youth was willing, but he had no sleuthing ability, it appeared. And further, he despised the Tejon people.

"Peons—ignorant, cowardly peons!" he branded them.

And then, all of a sudden, José Blanco, a Tejon rancher, proved himself a hero, and started tongues wagging. He had been riding along the Las Animas Trail when the lone robber, mounted on his bay horse, had confronted him and poked a gun at him. Blanco had one hundred and fifty dollars in cattle-sales money on him, and did not care to part with it. He held up his hands obediently, at the robber's command, but he surreptitiously jabbed his mustang with a sharp spur, on the far side, where the bandit could not see. The mustang jumped right into the bandit's bay.

This move was such a surprise to the robber that he fired instantly, and the bullet went wild. The two horses jammed together and Blanco grappled with the robber, and tried to get his gun. Blanco had no weapon. Blanco failed to get the gun, but the mask was torn from the robber's face, and Blanco got a good look at that face. He almost fell off his horse in surprise, but the bandit, not bothering to replace the mask, covered him with the gun again, cowed him, and relieved him of the one hundred and fifty dollars, after promising him death if he ever opened his mouth about it all.

Blanco opened his mouth, however. His roar was heard up and down the San Luis Valley. He came thundering into Monte Vista, with a galloping

group of friends, and went at once to the sheriff's office.

"Justice—I have come for it!" he announced.

"Easy, Blanco," soothed Sheriff Cook, "what's wrong?"

"I've been robbed of one hundred and fifty dollars—mucho wrong!"

"Waal, I'm sorry—I've tried my best to——"

"I know the robber, señor! I see his face! Ha! I know heem well, señor—an' thar he stands right thar!"

And Blanco pointed straight at the gaping Aranda!

There was a moment of tense silence and then Sheriff Cook stepped over and prevailed upon Blanco to take a chair. He was glowering at Aranda, and Aranda was staring in astonishment. The men who had come with Blanco were in an ugly mood. They appeared ready to jump on Aranda in an instant. The sheriff winked at Shorty to be ready for emergencies. Shorty was ready. He was juggling his six-gun in the air—tossing it up by the butt and catching it by the barrel as it came down—and whistling significantly. This demonstration was not lost on Blanco and his hot-headed friends.

"Thar'll be a hot time in the ol' town of——" mumbled Shorty hopefully, "ef—ef any one makes me mad—mad—*mad!*"

"When did this robbery happen, Blanco?" asked Cook.

"But yesterday afternoon."

"What time—exactly?"

"I dunno—between two thirty an' three o'clock."

"An' yuh recognized Aranda here, yuh say?"

"I do not *say*—I do *swear* it!" shouted Blanco. "Fust I recognize his bay hoss, the one he rode when he was in the Tejon with yuh an' Shorty. Fust I recognize that bay hoss——"

"Yes—I've heard about that hoss before. Go on!"

"Then I play smart. I jab my hoss with spur. Whoosh! Heem jump on robber's hoss. Ha, I pull mask from face—it is Aranda!"

"Between two thirty an' three o'clock, yuh say?"

"I swear it!"

"Sure o' the time?"

"Two times sure!"

"Then," said Sheriff Cook, frowning, "it was not Aranda! Yuh are mistaken, Blanco. Yuhr imagination is gettin' the best o' yuh! Yuh saw the bay hoss an' thought it was Aranda's! It seems the robber has got a hoss like my deputy's—an' then yuh imagined the rest, Blanco. Yuh may have thought he looked like Aranda—but yuh are mistaken, my dear sir, sadly mistaken."

"Why yuh say that, sheriff?"

"Because at the time yuh mention, yesterday, I was showing Deputy Aranda how to write out records of prisoners—right here in this office. We started right after lunch. We were here all afternoon—up to five o'clock—an' Shorty will bear me out!"

"Yup!" said Shorty promptly.

Blanco looked crushed for a minute. Then he shrugged his shoulders and glanced at his friends. They all shrugged their shoulders. Well——

Then Aranda stepped forward. His black eyes were blazing in wrath. His lips were twisted into a terrible snarl. His chin was up, majestically. He pointed a long finger at Blanco.

"Señor Librada Fresquez, alias Señor Blanco," he shouted, "I might remind you that the cell in Juarez waits patiently——"

That was all. Blanco stuttered and fumed and swore violently, and Aranda merely smiled at him. Blanco's friends looked worried. The sheriff finally ejected the whole lot, promising to come down again to the Tejon to search for the robber. After they were gone, Honorary Deputy Sheriff Aranda bowed to Sheriff Cook.

"I thank you—an' Fate," he said grandly, "that I was in your company yesterday, or that Fresquez, alias Blanco —would have framed me into trouble. Alas, he knows me, as I know him!"

Aranda smiled a smile of superiority at Shorty.

"It's this way," he said, "I must offer an apology. I said that I sought experience to return to my own land to become a secret agent for the government. I did not tell the exact truth! I am an agent for the government—rated, if you pardon me, as one of their best—and I seek not experience. I seek Señor Blanco and many other Mexicans around this city for sending arms and money to revolutionists in Mexico."

Aranda raised his head even higher.

"The rats have discovered my identity," he went on, "an' would swear I was the robber to get me into jail!"

Aranda's announcement was a bombshell to the sheriff. He didn't know whether to be angry or not, but he thawed out when Aranda told him that the high government officials in Mexico City had recommended Sheriff Cook for honesty, intelligence, and friendliness. Aranda went on to explain that he was not in Colorado to take prisoners—naturally, he could not expect to do that—but he was ferreting out the Colorado end of the conspiracy, so that the conspirators south of the Rio Grande could be nabbed later. He knew Blanco for a ringleader. He blamed Blanco in full for the attempts to link him with the lone robber.

"Ef it's that way," said Shorty, and he left abruptly.

But Aranda paid no heed to Shorty. He had long before decided that Shorty was crazy. The man said so many queer, disconnected things. The sheriff and Aranda got their heads together again and Aranda showed the sheriff more letters, in Spanish, and again the old sheriff was impressed. He promised, at Aranda's urgent pleading, to allow him to remain just one month longer as an honorary deputy sheriff. It was a perfect position, said Aranda, because it offered him some protection against his enemies, gave him a legal right to go armed, and aided him in his work for his government—which the government would appreciate!

"Blanco is wanted for murder in Jalisco," said Aranda, "so you need not fear him. You can close his mouth any day by letting him know you know that. Anyway, I hope to get him, at least, back to the Rio Grande—and after that he'll not trouble you!"

So Aranda remained as honorary deputy sheriff, and things ran smoothly for a day or two. Aranda, now that his revelations had been made to the sheriff, began to stray farther and farther from the office. He was winding up his own investigations. Meanwhile, at various intervals, the terror of the Tejon struck —and struck—and struck! The sheriff went down again, alone, but the trip was in vain. He found the Mexicans united against Aranda, however. But he had expected that. Indeed, many swore that Aranda was the bandit, but Sheriff Cook laughed. He could believe them —or his own eyes. And he had faith in his eyes. Every time the lone robber had struck, it happened that Aranda was right under the sheriff's nose. Plainly, the murderous Blanco had aroused the Tejon folks against Aranda. Sheriff Cook refused to shake hands with Blanco, as he met him, and that had angered Blanco all the more. He had sworn aloud and the old sheriff had simply mentioned "Jalisco," and let it go at that. He saw that the remark worried Blanco considerably.

When Sheriff Cook got back home he found Honorary Deputy Aranda in a great rage; and a fist fight in prospect.

"This Shorty, the fool!" cried Aranda, "I catch him red-handed riding my bay horse down the street!"

"What of it, yuh would-be detective?" Shorty was yelling.

"It is my hoss—yuh leave him alone!"

"Aw, what the heck!"

Sheriff Cook quieted the deputies. He ordered Shorty to leave Aranda's horse absolutely alone. Shorty stalked out grunting. Then the old sheriff explained to Aranda that Shorty was a great lover of horses and should be excused for being overfamiliar with animals that were not his. After that the sheriff launched into a long tirade against the terror of the Tejon, and Aranda listened sympathetically.

"It is possible there is no robber at all, my sheriff," suggested Aranda softly, "only a political pot boiling, as one might say. It may be a combination of Blanco and his conspirators, who are against me, and your enemies, to belittle us—to make it appear that we cannot catch a robber. It may be that, although I think the original plot was to attempt to frame me, even before I joined you as a deputy—fortunate that I joined!"

But Sheriff Cook was still worried.

"I think thar *is* a robber," he said reluctantly, "but whether thar is or not, this business is cookin' my goose fer me!"

Then the sheriff and Aranda sat for a long time discussing the robber, planning, scheming—and the sheriff realized that the Mexican youth was nobody's fool. He was smooth. He was sharp. He told how he had unraveled the mystery of the guns and money that Blanco and his conspirators were sending into Mexico. He seemed to have had little to go on, and yet to have worked up a good case against the conspirators. He repeated, for the 'steenth time, that he felt he and the sheriff would get the terror of the Tejon.

The next day Aranda rode away again. But he was back that evening. Shorty was still cool. In fact, as soon as Aranda put up his bay horse at the feed barn and came into the sheriff's office, Shorty got up and left. It was a very open, apparent insult, but Aranda appeared not to notice it. Again Sheriff Cook and his honorary deputy talked long into the night—and that night the lone robber of the Tejon district turned his big trick. He walked boldly into a dance hall on the Las Animas road, lined the fiddlers and the dancers along the wall, and robbed thirty-eight persons almost in the wink of an eye. As he left, he stampeded the horses outside. Then he vanished into the darkness.

The howl that went up from the victims fairly shook the San Luis Valley. Sheriff Cook rode to the Tejon next morning, as soon as a tired messenger had brought him the word of the outrage. But again, as so often before, there was nothing to go on. A man had appeared in the dance hall as if by magic, robbed the persons there, and fled. There were those who said he was Aranda, the honorary deputy of Monte Vista, and that made Sheriff Cook angry again. He was more careful than ever in questioning the victims. All their stories were the same. An unmasked man had robbed the dance hall. That much was certain. The descriptions varied. Only a few—probably Blanco's friends—declared that the man was Aranda, and to these, finally, Sheriff Cook addressed himself in terse words.

"Aranda, heck! Yuh say the robbery was at ten thirty—waal, Aranda was with me at that time! Ef yuh think yuh kin git me to help yuh frame a man, yuh're plumb loco! You've hindered my hunt fer the robber by givin' me false clews, by makin' baseless accusations, by bein' so insistent that Aranda was——"

"It was he!"

"It was Aranda!"

"Surely, that was the man!"

So the sheriff saddled up and came home, thoroughly angry. He had no patience with liars. And here was one prominent Tejon citizen after another charging Aranda with robbery, when the sheriff knew that Aranda had been with him at the time. Suggestions on the part of the sheriff that possibly some one had been impersonating Aranda had met with loud denials from the Tejonites.

"No, it was Aranda himself!"

"It was surely Aranda—we swear it!"

So the sheriff came home—and almost collapsed when he found Honorary Deputy Sheriff Roberto Aranda occupying the one large cell in the Monte Vista jail. He had been there since morning, he cried hysterically. He was clothed in a pair of overalls, and the sheriff gasped out his question breathlessly:

"Waal, what in heck——"

"Shorty!" cried Aranda angrily. "He arrested me fer wearin' my clothes—threw me in jail—then went away, laughing."

The sheriff opened the cell. He calmed Aranda, who was talking about shooting Shorty on sight, if the sheriff would lend him a gun. Shorty had taken Aranda's fancy gun. Also the badge. Also the sombrero with the gay ribbon on it. Also the velvet vest, with its gleaming, yellow braid. And the colorful silk shirt. And the big, flapping pantaloonlike chaps. And, naturally, Aranda was upset over it all.

"He say to me that I have no business wearing such fancy clothes," went on Aranda, "so he got the drop on me; forced me to undress, gave me the overalls, an' locked me up, making merry, and then leaving with my clothes, to throw them in the river," he said.

The sheriff groaned at that news.

"Shorty is goin' crazy, Aranda," he said soothingly, "but he'll pay fer yuhr clothes, señor—an' pay well!"

"He shall, indeed!"

"He sure will," repeated the sheriff, striking his clenched fist into his open palm. "I'm gettin' dog-gone tired o' all this monkey business—Blanco, an' Shorty, an' the Tejon robber! Like as not, Blanco an' his crowd has persuaded Shorty to join them agin' yuh, Aranda—that's the looks o' things to me, but I'll stand behind yuh, brother, until we has that Blanco——"

"Don't stand behind him too long, in case I has to put a bullet through him!" suggested a suave voice from the open door. The sheriff whirled around to look, but Aranda, who had been seated in a chair facing the door, merely lifted his head—and let out the wildest yell Monte Vista had heard in years.

"Git to one side, sheriff, in case he——" began Shorty.

The sheriff saw the gun in Shorty's hand. He also saw a stranger alongside of Shorty—and he rubbed his eyes quickly. But Señor Roberto Aranda had collapsed in his chair. He had put his head in his hands, and he was swearing tearfully in Spanish.

"Boss," grinned Shorty, shoving forward the stranger he had brought into the office with him, "shake hands with Señor——"

"Waal, I'll be danged!" exploded the sheriff.

"With Señor Aranda!" went on Shorty. "I must say, to be right, Señor Ramon Aranda. His brother, his twin brother Señor Roberto Aranda, sets moanin' an' groanin' in that chair thar."

The sheriff saw handcuffs on the newcomer's wrists.

"Yup," said Shorty, catching the look, "I got him—fer highway robbery, an' I want the honorary deputy thar fer conspiracy, as an accomplice, as the brains o' the brother-act. Honorary deputy—ha—ha!"

Sheriff Cook's face crimsoned.

"What's the big idear, yuh wearin' Aranda's clothes——"

He got no further. Shoving his handcuffed prisoner to one side, Shorty snatched another pair of handcuffs from the wall and plunged toward the man in the chair. *Click!* No resistance. The game up, the honorary deputy had lost all his nerve, it seemed.

"Waal, I got to thinkin', an' puttin' two an' two together," snapped Shorty, "an' I never liked this Roberto Aranda nohow. When the kicks came in that he was the Tejon robber I knew it wasn't so, but I got to figgerin' closer an' I guessed a twin proposition. I tried to foller the honorary deputy, but no good. I know pretty well where he went, but that was all."

Shorty paused for breath. He was triumphant now.

"I noticed that every time the Tejon robber struck, Aranda was here, provin' an alibi. When Aranda wasn't here, the robber didn't strike. So I decided they was meetin'. Aranda, bein' in yuhr confidence, could give the robber tabs on yuh, see? An' then the honorary deputy gave me the clew hisself right here!"

"Liar!" cried Roberto Aranda, looking up.

"Yuh said something about 'it bein' this way' once," went on Shorty, "an' that word 'way' gave me an idear. I knowed that yuh an' yuhr pal here were ridin' hosses just alike, an' dressin' the same, an' everything, an' I guessed the twin business—so I rode out on Aranda's bay hoss to-day, with all its trappings, an' dressed as Aranda, along the Tejon road I knowed Aranda takes, an' along comes Aranda No. 2 an' I holds him up before he discovers that I ain't Roberto comin' out to give him more facts."

The stranger—Ramon Aranda—nodded his head.

"The clothes and the horse," he said, "deceived me!"

"This Ramon Aranda ain't such a bad feller, outside o' bein' the Tejon robber," said Shorty. "He come through with everything as we rode in. Roberto was the brains o' the affair. It was planned fer Roberto to spy an' keep tabs on us, while Ramon robbed all the Mexicans, hide, hair, an' hoof! When Blanco got the mask off an' thought he recognized Roberto, our deputy, the brothers had to work fast, an' Roberto fixed up that yarn about him bein' a secret service man. His charges agin' Blanco naturally startled the pore Mex, an' he appeared to be guilty o' that Jalisco murder, which was a lie—in fact, all the Mexes was worried, wonderin' why yuh was protectin' the robber, as they thought."

"I wasn't protectin' nobody," said the sheriff.

"No," said Shorty, "but I was protectin' yuh, boss—an' I sure did it. Solvin' this case is sure to git us reelected."

"Liar!" cried Roberto Aranda, looking up again. "You said I gave myself away by using the expression 'it being this way.'"

"Correct," said Shorty, brightening, "I was watchin' yuh close, an' yuhr hoss—but it was the same hoss, I figgered, although I hoped that on some o' yuhr confabs with yuhr robber friend the two bay hosses would git mixed. Waal, I guess they did—an' bein' identical in looks an' trappings, yuh never noticed; but I weighed yuhr hoss on the wagon scales afore yuh left on yuhr last trip, honorary deputy, an' that bay weighed one thousand one hundred and twenty pounds. The bay yuh returned on, lookin' jus' the same, weighed one thousand one hundred and eighty pounds—after a hard trip—so, yuh see, it was this weight that——"

The twin brothers groaned in unison.

"Honorary deputy!" repeated Shorty, as his face got red and he slapped his thigh, "Honorary deputy—haw—haw!"

But none of his three listeners cracked a smile.

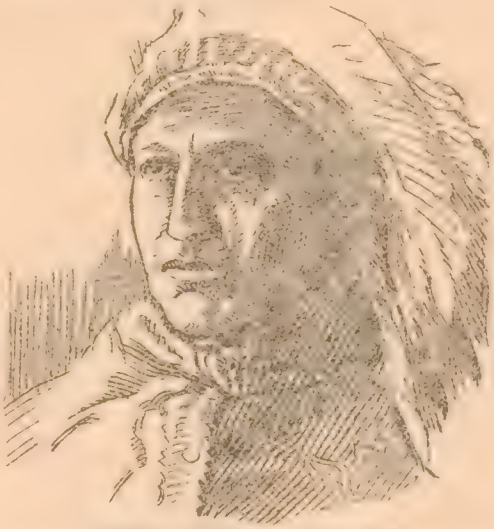
FAMOUS WESTERN STORY WRITERS
(PETER HENRY MORLAND)

By D. C. HUBBARD

LOOKING back into the dim vistas of his early childhood, Peter Morland still remembers a very, very old and gnarled man who most of the day sat wrapped in a great blanket, but who, despite his many years, stood tall and grim when he arose from his squatting posture, and walked with a stateliness which belied a worn and tired body. This man, whom Peter Morland called "Grampy," was really his great-great-grandfather, the only link that connected him with his Indian ancestors. All the other members of Peter's family were white. Grampy's wife, whom Peter never saw, had been the sole survivor of a band of white pioneers who had originally come from the mountains of Tennessee.

It is, doubtless, this remote Indian inheritance which has inspired Mr. Morland to weave many of his stories around the colorful and interesting red man. Born in a log cabin in the heart of the woods of what was then known as Indian Territory, many miles from any town, and with few neighbors, Peter made the growing things of the forest his playmates and exhibited more of his ancestral strain than any other member of his family. His ears were quicker to hear a wild animal; his eyes could see a bird or a chipmunk long before any one else. Not even his father could tread as quietly among fallen leaves and dead branches. He was the only child. Some said that Peter imbibed the spirit of the fast-fading Grampy as the old warrior made ready to go to his happy hunting grounds.

It is true that Peter bore a striking resemblance to Grampy, and when he was ten years old, and his father drove him to the nearest town, which was sixty miles away, to attend school, his companions nicknamed him "Injun." The boy had never been away from home, had never even played with children of his own age. The sleepy country town seemed to him a bedlam of noise and confusion. He missed the quiet nights, the distant howl of the wolves, and all the hundred sounds which spelled peace and romance to him. How he longed to go back, and how ashamed he was of his longing! Grampy had said, "Learn books or grow up know nothing. Ugh!" And the boy had a great regard for this queer old fellow who seemed to be a mysterious, kindred spirit.



PETER HENRY MORLAND

For years Peter Morland stayed at the school, only going home for a few brief visits. Then there was talk of a larger and better school, even farther away. When his father came to take him there, he was surprised to find no trace of his son. No one

seemed to know anything about him. He was not a confiding chap. Mr. Morland stayed in the town a few days and then turned his horse homeward. Arriving at the cabin, he found his boy, tired and disheveled, having gone the entire sixty miles on foot. He said he had heard Grampy call him, and he couldn't wait to argue the matter out with his father when he came to fetch him. And he had been right. Grampy was breathing his last, and gave the boy one of his rare smiles of pleasure at seeing him before he closed his eyes forever.

The following year Peter's family moved to the outskirts of Chicago, and eventually Peter graduated from college. While looking around for something to do, he met a man named Barclay who wrote a little, but who did not have to depend upon that for his living, as he was quite well off. He invited Morland to his home and interested him in writing, telling him his experiences, and coaxing him to set down some of his intimate knowledge of the wild. It was not long before Peter Morland developed a flair for story telling. Later, upon the advice of this same friend, he took advantage of his Indian resemblance, dressed in the fashion of his ancestors, and spoke before a club of people interested in Indian lore. In this he was so successful that he soon became so busy lecturing that he had no time to write, but as he was gaining much in exchanging ideas he drifted along for nearly two years, going from place to place, and from club meeting to club meeting, always donning his costume.

Suddenly, one night, in the midst of a particularly interesting gathering, "Injun Pete," as he was called, was seized with an urgent desire to write a story, the idea of which had been simmering in his mind for some time. At the end of the meeting, disregarding invitations for a late supper, he hurried home and began his story, writing 'way into the small hours of the morning. So engrossed did he become in his fiction writing that he began to refuse opportunities to speak before "The Red Men and Their Traditions Club," "The Society of Indian Folklore," and other organizations. Something within him kept urging him so strongly that he obeyed the impulse and stuck to his task. Not his first, but his second effort was accepted by WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. The Indian suit and the peace pipe of Grampy were laid away in a trunk. No doubt many of you are familiar with some of Morland's later works, such as "Beyond the Outposts," "The Squaw Boy," "The White Cheyenne," and "The Range Finder." Injun Pete at last found what he wanted to do, and he is still doing it.

SOLUTION OF THE AGE RIDDLE OF WOOD

THE way to determine the exact date of fossil forest deposits has recently been discovered by a Swedish forester. Before this discovery by Ake Berg, of Stockholm, Sweden, the age of wooden objects unearthed by archæologists was a source of much uncertainty. The forester's method is based on the observation that the year rings of the wood vary in width according to local climatic conditions and that this variation is absolutely uniform in different trees in the same neighborhood.

When this system is fully developed it is expected that it will help scientists in ascertaining the exact age of fossilized tree trunks and prehistoric articles of wood found in the earth. So the forester's contribution to archæology bids fair to be an incalculable aid to scientists.

Sap and Fish

By *Roland Krebs*

Author of "Hot Dogs!" etc.

THE next time the Carnegie people dish out hero medals, I want one as big as a dishpan for saving "Shorty" Nolan's life.

It's not that I snatched him from in front of an onrushing railroad train, or fished him out of a icy river, or drug him from a burning building. I saved the little sap from a worse fate than those. Besides, I made him some money.

Here's how. It all started one afternoon when I stumbled across Shorty sitting on a nail keg, reading—quite a trick in itself.

At first I paid him no attention, thinking that he was reading Chaucer or one of those fellows again, by way of making himself popular with Alberta Pritchard, the Snake Hollow school-teacher that both him and "Slim" Evers are mad about.

But, after it had gone on for an hour, I knew it must be something else again, because the guy who can read Chaucer for one hour straight hasn't been born yet.

I found out he was reading the latest catalogue of Houlihan & Silberpfennig, the Eastern mail-order house that stands ready to mail you anything from a safety pin to suspension-bridge piers.

I sighed. It was too bad. Shorty's always sending his hard-earned dough to Houlihan & Silberpfennig, whose directors probably give him a silent, rising vote of thanks every time they meet and declare another dividend.

"What are you buying this time—some picture post cards of the Chicago World's Fair or a set of elevator doors?" I asked him.

"Why—ah—nothing yet," he answered me, slapping the book shut quickly.

"Anything I can help you with?" I inquired.

Shorty got a hang-dog look plastered across his pan and hemmed and hawed.

"Maybe you could, Al," he admitted finally. Then, after a long pause and a gulp, "Al, I guess in the days when you was a vaudeville actor——"

"You mean vaudeville star," I corrected him.

"Exactly. In those days, I guess, you had a full-dress suit—soup and fish—didn't you?"

"I was practically born in soup and fish," I kidded him. "Why?"

He ignored my question. "How do you think I'd look in such an outfit?"

"You'd be an act," I laughed.

"Aw, you can't ever be serious," Shorty spluttered. "I'm thinking of sending for one of these uniforms." He opened the catalogue to two pages of pictures of gooks standing around in one-cylinder hats and shirts boiled harder than picnic eggs.

"Why? Are you going to open a restaurant? Do you want to scare all the cattle off the range?" I saw the time had come, not for fast talking so much as fast razzing.

"Oh, correct evening clothes can be handy in a thousand ways," he told me in an offhand way. "In a State as big as Montana there's always folks dying that got to have decent funerals, and then there's weddings you can wear them to, and—oh, well, lots of things!"

I gave him a look that had a search warrant in both eyes. "Now tell me, Shorty, as man to man," I asked him shrewdly, "are you fixing to buy these trick clothes to wear to the Reardon housewarming two weeks from tonight?"

He swallowed hard, looked kind of pleadingly at me, and finally, like a man getting something off his conscience, he blurted out, "Yeah, I do."

"Don't do it, Shorty," I warned the runt. "The guests will lynch you. It won't be a housewarming. It'll be a tarwarming. You'll get tarred and feathered, sure. Why, Shorty, they'll ride you out of this part of the country on a rail. You may even get shot. Some folks can't stand kidding."

"Yes, and I'm one of the folks that can't stand kidding," he snapped at me. "You quit your own kidding."

"I'm not kidding," I pleaded with him. "I'm serious. You know you can't get away with it. Nobody around these parts wears such trick clothes. Why, they don't even let you bury folks in soup and fish in this valley."

"Somebody's got to educate these yokels around here," the small simp cracked. "If somebody don't set them no pace and smarten them up to what's proper, why, they'll start slipping backward and wind up wearing coonskin caps and moccasins."

"I won't say you're slipping backward," was my next shot at him, "but, boy, you're sure slipping."

Don't get the idea I want you to believe that Montana is the old West of the comic papers, where anybody who don't go without socks is suspected of having just arrived from New York at least, if not London. We've got electric lights and good roads and divorces and all other modern conveniences out here, same as other parts of the United States.

But, when somebody pitches a party and invites a lot of ranch folks, you don't show up there in soup and fish, unless you're being paid for the evening by the entertainment committee to take rabbits out of hats and extract the seven of clubs from some gentleman's mustache.

As a matter of fact, at any party any of our neighbors'd give, you could, if you came right from your work, show up in your oldest rags and know nobody would sniff you over and tilt their nose at you.

Yet, because this little sap of a Shorty Nolan is nutty about lifting himself up, up, up, and up to impress Alberta, why, he ignores what he knows as well as I know.

I could just picture what would happen to him. In the first place, the Reardon family would be all for mashing him for trying to high-hat their guests as well as put a jinx on the

new house that was getting its warming up.

In the second place, the guests themselves would be apt to mob Shorty as a dangerous modern exerting a corrupting influence on the younger generation.

In the third place, I doubt if the boys would ever let Shorty leave the R Bar R in such a rig, feeling that the reputation and honor and escutcheon and whatnot of our outfit was at stake. Old "Biffalo Bull," anyway, I know darned good and well, would be red hot for hanging Shorty to the handiest tree.

It was easy for me to see that in the frame of mind the little clown was in, it wouldn't do me any good to argue with him. I quit trying to talk him out of his notion, figuring that maybe I could stew something up within the two weeks till the Reardons had their bender.

I didn't do so good in those two weeks. While I had my back turned, Shorty sent a money order to the Houlihan & Silberpfennig Company, and when he showed me pictures in the catalogue of the stuff he'd ordered, I knew that that firm must have got its start peddling gold bricks around railroad stations.

He didn't quit at a complete soup-and-fish outfit. He sent for a silk hat —listen, call a notary, and I'll swear to this!—and patent-leather shoes, and a white-silk muffler, and—steady, brace yourself!—and an Inverness cape, or I'm a codfish.

"Don't tell me I won't look like something!" Shorty cackled to me.

"You'll look like a guy who's spent a whole night dropping nickels into an electric piano and saying, 'Fill 'em up again, bartender,'" I snorted at him. "When do you expect this masquerade to arrive? I want to hold up the train."

"It'll be here in time for the Reardon housewarming—a couple of days before, even," he said. A foxy look came into his mug. "Say, Al," he said, "if you mention it around among the boys that I'm getting new rags, don't tell them just what kind, will you? They might do the same and sort of steal my thunder, you know. Especially Slim Evers might."

"Don't worry," I promised him, "that I'll blab it around. Do you think I want anybody to suspect that I'm a party to this?"

I was doing all the going into town for mail the week the Reardons were having their party, and Shorty Nolan like to drove me cuckoo, asking me each time I went in not to forget to inquire if there was a parcel-post package for him, and asking me every time I got back to the R Bar R if the package hadn't come, and why.

"It'll be here sure, though," he told me each time, and each time I told him, "Boy, you're in luck every day they miss sending you that outfit."

When only three days shy of the evening for the party, with no soup and fish yet in sight, Shorty was horribly gloomy. Still, he wasn't too gloomy to write to the school-teacher, asking her if he could escort her to the housewarming.

I came on him in the bunk house, where he was making faces at writing paper and tearing it up and chewing a penholder like it was a lollypop. After he had pumped me a couple of times about how to spell these and those words, I asked him, "Inviting Alberta to the Reardon shindig, Shorty?"

"Sure am," he grinned, not noticing that his hated rival, Slim Evers, had come into the bunk house and was standing behind him.

"Haw, haw, haw! That's good!" Slim busted out. "That's red hot, that is. Hey, ain't you ever heard about how the early bird grabs off the worm? The school-teacher's going with me."

The penholder slid out of poor Shorty's paw, and his face fell till it seemed to sag all over his shirt front. Without any more conversation he put his ink and paper away and started for the outside, trying to whistle "We're Crazy About Each Other," but getting most of it mixed with most of "My Country, 'Tis of Thee I Sing."

It was a dirty trick that Slim played, because next day I happened to be coming out of one of the stores in town, and I bumped into Alberta and Slim at the door, just as he was asking her to let him see her to and from the Reardons' place and just as she, unsuspecting, was saying it would be jake with her. Still, who am I to take a hand? Anybody that craves matrimony as bad as Shorty can't learn too soon to do his own think-fast chores.

Well, anyway, the day of the Reardon affair finally arrived, and Shorty, still without his dress suit, was in a stew. I guess he must have reminded me five times as I was climbing on my pony with the mail sack not to forget to ask after his package.

I did, too, but Barney Garland, the acting postmaster and about the nearest one of the R Bar R's neighbors, said it hadn't come.

Barney was keyed away up to E over a new tractor that had just been dumped off at the railroad freight house for delivery to Barney's brother, who aimed to pull stumps with it, drag roads, plow, and whatnot.

Nothing would do but Barney had to drag me over to the freight house to see the contraption.

"They're wonders," he told me. "About all you can't do with them is wash and iron. I'm going to drive it out to my brother's place late this afternoon, so he can use it as soon as he gets back from Kalispel day after tomorrow."

The tractor was a great, big clumsy thing. It set me thinking. I told Barney about Shorty's soup and fish, and how he squandered away money, buying stuff he had no need for from the mail-order people, Houlihan & Silberpfennig.

"Shorty's easy to fool, Barney," I said. "Maybe we can cure him of this mail-order mania he's got. When I get back, I'll tell him there's a package here for him too big for me to take on the pony, and that you'll be by right away with your machine and deliver it.

"Spread it on. Tell him there's postage due on this tractor, which they must have sent him by mistake, and that he's got three days in which to pay the United States government four hundred and eighty-eight dollars and twenty-two cents for money advanced for the merchandise he ordered, an order by mail being construed a contract by the supreme court *et al and et cetera.* Tell him if he don't cough up four hundred and eighty-eight dollars and twenty-two cents in three days, they'll dust out a cell in Leavenworth for him. You won't need the tractor until your brother gets back from Kalispel, anyway. I think a guy who orders soup and fish for a party and gets a tractor sent to him instead will be plenty mad and ready hereafter to patronize the home industries."

"You bet!" Barney said, laughing all over on account there's nothing he'd rather do than job somebody for a laugh.

As I started back to the outfit, I was sorry to see clouds gathering and to hear a distant rumble of thunder that threatened bum weather for the Reardon party. The storm didn't break, though, during my ride.

However, another storm broke before I got back to the R Bar R. It was Shorty Nolan. He had come down the road a piece to meet me, him being so anxious and all for his soup and fish.

"Where's my packages?" he yelled as soon as I got near enough to hear him.

"Barney Garland said they were too big for me to carry," I told him, "but he'll be by himself in a little while and deliver your bundle."

"How big was my package?" Shorty asked.

"I didn't see it," I said, the same being the truth.

For the next hour Shorty paced back and forth like a father waiting for twins. All the while the rest of the boys were busy in the bunk house, shaving, combing, brushing, and primping like a lot of chorus janes.

Slim Evers was the first to finish and leave.

"Any message you want me to give Alberta for you?" he asked Shorty with a sarcastic grin as he cranked his flivver touring car.

"Uh—no," Shorty mumbled.

"You sap!" Slim cackled as he drove away.

That "You sap!" of Slim's hurt Shorty, Shorty being such a sap and all.

"I'll show him who's a sap," he growled to me.

Everybody except me, who was to stay behind and look after things, and Shorty, had gone to the Reardons before Barney Garland arrived. Shorty saw him coming down the road first.

"No wonder he's so slow," Shorty Nolan fussed. "He's riding on a tractor. I got a good mind to write to the postmaster general and complain that he's making deliveries late on a tractor. Wonder what he bought a tractor for?"

The little runt and I walked out to meet Barney.

"Here," said Barney, climbing down off the seat and shoving a book and pencil at Shorty, "sign here."

"Where's my goods?" Shorty inquired, signing.

"Here," said Barney, slapping the tractor.

"Where?" Shorty asked, his eyes poppyfied.

"Right here," Barney repeated, patting the tractor again.

"There's six cents postage due. Give me six cents."

With a wild stare in his eyes, Shorty mechanically fished six cents out of his pocket. He was still looking around the tractor for some kind of a bundle.

"What are you aiming to do with a tractor, Shorty?" Barney put in, fighting down a laugh.

"Me? Tractor? Say, you don't mean this tractor is for me?"

Barney put on his spectacles and gawked into his book. "You placed an order with Houlihan & Silberpfennig, didn't you?" he asked.

"For clothes, not machinery," Shorty Nolan gasped.

"Well, they must have got the orders mixed," Barney laughed. "Houlihan & Silberpfennig are famous for bawling up their orders. I quit dealing with them on that account. I ordered a lamp-wick cleaner, and they sent me a teething ring. Say, by the way, I don't guess you got that much cash on you, but inside of three days you got to pay up four hundred and eighty-eight dollars and twenty-two cents still due on that order."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" Shorty exploded.

"You may be hanged if you don't," Barney warned him. "You can't get gay with Uncle Sam's money matters. Well, s'long, fellows."

"That's a fine how-do-you-do!" Shorty busted out when Barney Garland had gone. "A fellow orders clothes and gets farm machinery! I'm surprised you can send such stuff by mail."

"You can mail almost anything nowadays," I suggested. "The government is the servant of the people, you know.

Ain't you going to the Reardon party now?"

"Of course not!" the little cuckoo snapped. He walked around the machine, looking at it. Then I saw him examine a tag wired to the seat support. He tore it off and stuffed it into a pocket.

Pretty smart of Barney, I thought, to put a phony tag on it into the bargain.

Shorty climbed up on the driver's seat and drove the thing under the wagon shed.

It was good he did, because just then the storm broke. There was a crash of thunder that nearly ruined our ears, followed by the by-golliest hailstorm I ever saw. Talk about hailstones being as big as hens' eggs! If any hen ever laid an egg as big as those hailstones she'd cackle herself hoarse with pride.

It kept us prisoners under the wagon shed for ten or fifteen minutes. Then the hail let up, and rain came down in lakes. The weather man must have knocked off whatever else he was doing to concentrate all his attention on having it rain.

"Gee!" Shorty said to me, watching the puddles grow. "This will be tough on the Reardons' guests. You know what that private road of theirs is."

I had been thinking the same thing. The Reardons' road is dirt boulevard in dry weather, but after a rain it's just ooze that hardly no car can get through.

It rained for a solid hour, and still there was no sign of a let-up. I got busy toasting some bacon and eggs for chuck, and after a while I noticed Shorty wasn't around. Neither was his poncho or mine.

I heard a sudden series of explosions outside, and when I looked out of a window, why, I saw Shorty driving the tractor out to the county road, right through mud and holes and puddles and all. Spread over him was the big umbrella that came with the tractor.

It didn't take me long to guess where he was going. It shouldn't take you long, either.

It was close to midnight that I heard the sputtering of the tractor coming back. I looked out, and by two lanterns' light I could see that Shorty at the tractor controls was towing a flivver in which sat Slim Evers, sore and sour.

Shorty pulled him under the shed, killed the engine of his tractor, and came into the bunk house, leaving Slim outside to crawl under his flivver with a lantern for a look.

Man, oh, boy! Shorty was mud up to the hips. He had my poncho in his hand. There was a grin on his face and a twenty-dollar bill in his hand.

"Al," he laughed as soon as he saw me, "I'm off the soup and fish. You're right. Look at this mud on me! This is no country for ballroom clothes."

"Going to keep the tractor?" I asked him.

"Quit your kidding," he chortled. "You probably knew all along that Barney Garland was up to one of his jokes. Look."

He took the tag out of his pocket that I'd seen him jerk off the seat support. It was from the Gibraltar Tractor Corporation of Des Moines, Iowa, to Fred Garland, Barney's brother. Then it dawned on me that the tag wasn't one Barney had put on, but one he'd overlooked taking off.

"In fact, I'm through with Houlihan & Silberpfennig," Shorty said.

Outside I suddenly heard Slim start to cuss and throw tools around.

"Sweet music!" Shorty busted out.

"What ails him?" I asked.

"Plenty!" Shorty said, with another fit of laughing. "Just as I figured when I left here, Slim got stuck in the mud. He couldn't move. He even broke his rear end trying to get out.

There him and Alberta sat, rain pouring in on them by the bucket. Them hailstones just tore Slim's flivver's top to shreds.

"Well, sir, the lady in distress suddenly sees me drive up in my tractor, going right through mud and everything. What do I do? I offer her your poncho, and invite her up on the seat beside me under the umbrella, where it's as dry as you could hope for. Then I offered to tow Slim home for twenty bucks. He didn't have any choice. So, I saw his girl home and laughed at him every foot of the way."

Just then the door was kicked open and nearly off its hinges as Slim came stomping in, soaked. "Howdy, Al," he growled to me and glared at the same time at Shorty. "Peace of a night, ain't it?"

"It's been a wonderful night!" Shorty howled with another fit of horse-laughing.

He took the twenty-dollar bill and tucked it into a folder.

"A sap, am I?" he said to Slim. Then he shook his head and grinned a nasty grin. "You poor fish!" Shorty said.

THE INDIAN FEAST OF GUADALUPE

THE unique, if annual, feast of Guadalupe has recently been celebrated in the Indian village of Tortugas. Bonfires were lighted at dusk on the mountain near the village to form a great cross, summoning Indians from all the countryside to attend the festival, which celebrates the anniversary of the miraculous appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe, patron saint of Mexico.

The feast is accompanied by days of dancing to the thump of native drums and is rendered colorful by the presence of many tribesmen, garbed in their gay clothing and warriors' headdress. Many of the more agile of these go through a series of dance figures depicting the protection of the Virgin from evil spirits. Some Indian people dance continuously for ten or twelve hours during the ceremony.

The anniversary is observed in many little Indian communities along the Rio Grande, but the most elaborate of the festivals is that of the Indians at Tortugas, New Mexico. The feast is a curious mixture of ancient Indian tradition and old Spanish Catholicism. It begins with a procession led by a tribesman, intrusted with an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who—tradition says—appeared to Juan Diego, a lowly Indian woodcutter, while he was at work in the mountains near Mexico City, in 1531.

In former days it was the custom for various members of the tribe to crawl the six miles to the mountain to light the signal fires on the evening before the dance. Now, however, the journey is made by automobile.

Red Raiders

(Black Hawk, Victorious Though Vanquished)

by A. B. Searles

Author of "Roman Nose and the Charge of the Cheyennes", etc.

OT least among the Indian warriors who within the memory of some still living were yet a peril in the West, was Black Hawk, the once redoubtable chieftain of the Sacs and Foxes.

Black Hawk was brave, and, in a sense, noble; yet he was actuated mainly by a selfish greed for power and personal revenge. His speech was fair, his black deeds silvered over with gentle words—but his conduct was not such as to command unadulterated admiration.

The sachem first became important to the whites in 1830. During that year the united tribes of the Sacs and Foxes had, through the negotiations of a chief named Keokuk, transferred most of their territory to the United States, and had then agreed to move on west of the Mississippi. In this transaction Black Hawk, one of the most powerful of all the warriors, was not consulted. To the brave this oversight seemed a signal insult, and he lost no time in showing his displeasure by sowing discontent among his people. In a short while he had amassed a considerable following and was making plans for open rebellion against the authority of the older chieftain. Before this crisis was reached, however, trouble arose between the whites and the Indians, and at once all the vindictive fury of Black Hawk was turned against the interloper and away from his own race.

"We must have war," Black Hawk declared to the council of his people, "otherwise we shall be driven into the Far West, without lands, horses, or shelter. Those of you who are cowards may follow Keokuk, but those of you who wish to maintain your own against the aggressions of these whites must take up your tomahawks with me."

Hostilities did not follow immediately, however. It remained for the whites to further provoke the red men. One of the old strongholds of the tribe was the Sac village, located on a point of land at the confluence of the Mississippi and Rock Rivers. This, though it fell within the ceded territory, the

Indians continued to occupy. In the fall of 1830 the savages went as usual to hunt for their winter furs. But upon their return the redskins found their lodges in possession of white men, women, and children. These refused to leave, and the tribe decided to drive them out by force.

This failing, the two races attempted to live together. But the aggressive palefaces drove the less sturdy red men to the wall, and after a time most of them moved out, headed by Keokuk. But Black Hawk remained and with him a number of his hot-blooded followers.

Then the whites tried persuasion, and a council was held in an attempt to bind Black Hawk to a peaceful agreement. Armed to the teeth, the brave flung his defiance to his opponents.

"I am not afraid of the Americans," he proclaimed, "and I will not move from my rightful possessions. I am fully able to make war against your soldiers and to drive them into the sea, if necessary. Let your men come on. I am ready to receive them."

But despite this boast, when the militia moved up a day or so later, the Indians abandoned their position without the firing of a gun. Within two days Black Hawk appeared under a flag of truce, demanding another parley, and this time he and his malcontents agreed to withdraw from the disputed territory.

But the Indians, though for the time cowed, were not appeased. In 1831 Black Hawk's men grew bolder, and finally they attacked a party of peaceable Sioux, encamped near an American fort at Prairie du Chien, killing twenty-eight. Infuriated, the white settlers demanded the surrender of the murderers. But Black Hawk refused to give them up, saying:

"This is an affair between two Indian tribes, independent of the authority of the Great White Father. I will not give up my people because of this. You can do what you like about it."

In this he was in the wrong, for the Sioux at the time of the massacre were under the protection of the United States government.

By this time Black Hawk had a force which amounted to nearly one thousand warriors. These redskins fell upon the frontier settlements, burning, pillaging, scalping, murdering with ruthless hand. To check this uprising the governor of Illinois ordered out a brigade of militia, and under General Atkinson the soldiers marched to the scene of hostilities. Regular troops soon joined the militia and in a short time over three thousand trained men were advancing upon the arrogant chief and his rebel band.

But Black Hawk, despite his boasts, realized that he was powerless against such numbers and silently withdrew into the swamps. Thence he continued to make sudden sallies against the unprotected countryside.

Atkinson, seeing that he could not approach Black Hawk with his entire command, dispatched two hundred and seventy men to reconnoiter. Learning of their coming, the sachem sent emissaries under a flag of truce. The white flag was ignored and the envoys were seized. Two others who came in search of the first group were killed outright. Naturally, the Indians were infuriated at this breach of faith. Though only forty remained in the camp, the rest having gone on a hunting expedition, this small band armed and arranged themselves for a fray. The approach of the soldiers was clumsy and open. In much disorder they crossed a little creek and pushed toward the entrenchments of the warrior chieftain. Suddenly the redskins fell upon them. Though far outnumbering the Indians, the white men were no match for the savages, and finally

the thoroughly beaten soldiers turned tail and ran. It was a decided triumph for the rebels.

Now completely aroused, Atkinson determined to wipe out the Indian band. His scouring parties attacked the redskins at every point, driving them from their hiding places. Black Hawk and his men were soon grievously cornered. No provisions were procurable and the Americans were almost upon him. In one sharp encounter he lost sixteen men and saw many of his women and children captured. The once boastful chieftain began to be terrified by the strength of his foe. On August 1, 1832, the final encounter took place.

Black Hawk and a small party managed to escape. With his little band he reached the Winnebago village of Prairie du Chien, and, despairing of eluding pursuit, told the citizens that he wished to surrender to the whites, who might put him to death if they wished. Here he met with no harm; indeed he was acclaimed almost as a hero. After a few days of rest he was delivered to the American general, Street.

This brave soldier greeted the chieftain courteously—even cordially—and asked what he had to say for himself. The captured sachem drew himself to his full height. Upon his face was stamped an expression of stern and haughty malevolence. He answered the charges against him thus:

"You have taken me prisoner with all my warriors. I am much grieved, for I expected, if I did not defeat you, to hold out much longer and give you more trouble before I surrendered. When I saw that I could not defeat you by Indian fighting, I determined to rush on you and fight you face to face. I fought hard. But your guns were well-aimed. The bullets flew like birds in the air and whizzed by our ears like the wind through the trees in winter. My warriors fell about me. I saw my evil day at hand. The sun rose dim on us in the morning and at night it sunk in a dark cloud and looked like a ball of fire. That was the last sun that shone on Black Hawk. His heart is dead and no longer beats quick in his bosom. He is now a prisoner to the white men and they will do with him as they wish. But he can stand torture and is not afraid of death. He is no coward. Black Hawk is an Indian.

"He has done nothing for which an Indian need be ashamed. He has fought for his countrymen, the squaws, and papooses, against the white men who came year after year to cheat them and take away their lands. You know the cause of our making war. It is known to all white men. They ought to be ashamed of it. They despise the Indians and drive them from their homes.

"Black Hawk is a true Indian and disdains to cry like a woman. He feels for his wife, his children, and his friends. But he does not care for himself. He cares for his nation and the Indians. They will suffer. He laments their fate——

"Farewell, my nation! Black Hawk tried to save you and avenge your wrongs. He drank the blood of some of the whites. He has been taken prisoner and his plans are stopped. He can do no more. His sun is setting and will rise no more. Farewell, Black Hawk!"

The sachem's fate, however, was not so dark as he anticipated. Although General Street had been somewhat impressed by Black Hawk's oration, the noted brave was kept a prisoner and sent to Washington to confer with President Andrew Jackson. For a moment the warrior contemplated the paleface chieftain in silence. Then he said:

"I am a man and you are another. Do with me as you will. I know that you will give me fair treatment."

"You must feel no uneasiness about your women and children," responded the president. "They will be looked after, and protected from all the enemies. But you must promise me never to lift the hatchet against a white man again. Then only can you return to your own race."

Having given the necessary oath of friendship, the sachem with a number of his companions was sent on to Norfolk, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. Everywhere the adulation of the crowds who turned out to see him, seems to have pleased him highly.

This journey taught him much. He was much impressed by the evidences of power that met him on all sides, for he exclaimed at his own temerity in believing that he could defeat these whites. From New York he was sent back to his own home and set at liberty.

In 1837 at a celebration of Independence Day at Fort Madison, Wisconsin, his was the place of honor, and his health was proposed and drunk amid cheers and applause.

Black Hawk, the defeated yet victorious chieftain, died in 1838. At his funeral many white men mingled with the Indians who paid their last respects to his memory. According to the custom of his people, he was placed upon the ground in a sitting posture, a cane between his knees to support his hands. Then huge slabs of rock were piled about him, and he was left to the mercies of the elements.

Strangely enough, his body was stolen less than a year later, by a morbid curiosity hunter. Traced to the office of a surgeon in Quincy, Illinois, it was seized by the government and returned to the friends of the old warrior.

To-day the bones of the famous chieftain lie at rest beneath the earth with only a simple headstone to mark the grave of the greatest leader of the Sacs and Foxes.

THE SOUTHWEST TURNS TO DAIRYING

ONCE agriculture in a certain group of States of the Southwest—included in which are Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas—constituted straight farming or stock raising. Now, however, the region is turning in a large degree to dairying. In fact, in the States mentioned above, dairying has become an industry of such importance that the annual income from dairy products in the Southwest now amounts to the incredibly large sum of one hundred and twenty million dollars a year.

Statistics on the growth of dairy farming in the Southwestern States include the following: In 1920, the creameries of the States in question churned 87,284,000 pounds of butter; and in 1926, 153,534,000 pounds—an increase of 66,250,000 pounds. At the same time, the production of condensed milk and cheese in the districts in question has increased proportionately.

To faciliate the manufacture and distribution of the dairy products there are large centralizers located throughout this region—one of the most notable being that at Fort Worth, Texas. Also, a vast number of smaller plants, including milk condenseries, cheese factories, and powdered-milk factories, are scattered through the region.

The vast production of milk in the Southwest is said to be due to the fact that the cost of production is materially less than in the dairy sections of the more Eastern and Northern States.

Open Water

By Seth Ranger

Author of "That Biggest Fish", etc.

THERE was a spirit of unrest in the building known as Placer Home. Here were gathered various men who had struggled for years to find pay dirt and failed. At least, each chalked up his own efforts as complete failure, yet each had had a hand in the making of an empire, and who will call that failure?

It was spring. And every man in the Home remembered the time when the break-up came, winter reluctantly retreated before the warmth of the spring sun, and a man could pan the top dirt, and sometimes go all the way to bed rock without thawing it. And because it was spring and the break-up near, there was unrest in the Home. Each year it was the same. Each year it passed, though sometimes men heeded the call and escaped. Generally they either returned of their own accord or were picked up by friends and sent back.

"Sport" Corbin, who was a hundred years old and still going strong—with the aid of a stout cane, good false teeth, and a pair of glasses—squinted his eyes and tinkered with the dials on the radio. "Wonder if we can get Cold Deck," he grumbled, "or will the air be plumb full of chechahco stations?"

As anything coming from the Outside is a chechahco, or tenderfoot, it will be seen that Sport's term was strictly to the point. Every man in the Home would sooner hear the notes of a sour fiddle from Cold Deck than the finest program the largest broadcasting company could render.

The radio, the best money could buy, was a gift from "Hardrock" Shipley and "Poke" Tupper, two sour doughs on whom fortune had smiled. It was guaranteed to pick up anything in the way of a vibration that might be running loose, but it was tuned in on Alaska stations most of the time.

Suddenly it came to life.

Eeecek. Squawk! Eeeeeoooooou—bloop!

Sport Corbin groaned. "One of them danged tubes howlin' again.

Hello! Now I'm gettin' suthin', boys. Listen——"

"Why, you lop-eared pelican! Who ever told you you could drive a mule!"

"Listen here, you little red-headed runt! One more word from you and I'll make a merry-go-round out of you."

"You and how many of your friends?" the first voice demanded.

Then the radio announcer's voice cut in: "Gentlemen! Gentlemen. Just remember you are gentlemen!"

"I'm a gent, but it's danged hard to remember it when a fellow is hooked up with a bum for a pardner. Listen, Poke, you long drink of water, for two cents I'd work you over so your best friends wouldn't know you."

"There's your two cents, Hardrock, now try and do it!"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!"

At this moment Sport Corbin let out a howl of joy. "It's Hardrock Shipley and Poke Tupper having one of their fights," he yelled, "I hope that fool radio man don't stop it!"

Over the air came sounds of crashing fists, grunts, and voices—sometimes loud, sometimes faint, depending on how close the pair were to the microphone. Frequently intruding was the radio announcer's voice. "Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" And once, during the fight, they heard Poke's voice: "Shut up! We ain't either one of us gentlemen and don't want to be!"

There was a click, then silence. The radio station had been shut off. The room, filled with old sour doughs, groaned in unison.

"And they had to switch off a rough-and-tumble fight between Poke and Hardrock and us all enjoyin' it!" groaned Sport Corbin. "Old as I am, I could lick that radio man single-handed. He ain't got a drop o' red blood in his veins. It's bad enough being cooped up in a Home where you can't see the ice go out, can't dry a salmon, play with a sled dog, or see a fight, without spoilin' what little comes this way."

The nurse came in at that moment. "We are bringing Mike McClure up," she said. "Do what you can to cheer him up, boys!"

Mike was subject to attacks of melancholia each spring. Patiently enduring the life of the Home nine months of the year, with the northward flight of the geese and ducks he seemed to realize that his day was done and they had to watch him carefully because he did not want to live. The silver-haired group in the room made ready for their glum associate. His lips were moving, as they wheeled him in, and he glanced around without interest. Presently he blinked his eyes. "Just to hear the ice go out once more," he muttered, "just to have a chance on the ice pool!" He sighed deeply.

They tried to buck him up, but with small success. "Poke and Hardrock just had a fight," Sport Corbin said, "but the darned radio man cut us off. I'll try again!"

He plugged in, and once more what was happening at Cold Deck leaped the mountains, sped southward, and came to the Home. The announcer's voice was still somewhat ruffled.

"Sorry, folks," he said, "but it was just a little friendly fight between partners. No damage done, though some of the furniture in the broadcasting room was wrecked. Those engaged were Hardrock Shipley and Poke Tupper. They just mushed in from Big Nugget with twelve thousand dollars' in gold. This is the camp's contribution to the ice pool. Instead of using dog teams as most do, Hardrock and Poke use a former army mule known as Tabasco. Some dispute started as to the proper handling of the mule and continued until they got to this station. Each was carrying a

sack of gold and it was the heaving of the sacks at each other that caused all the noise and broke the furniture. Incidentally, there is gold all over the floor. The noise you hear is Poke Tupper sweeping it up with a broom. When they are gone, I'm going to take the broom home and pan it.

"For the benefit of those who do not understand the ice pool, of which there are several in the North, it is operated in this manner. Each year, as you doubtless know, when the ice goes out, navigation begins. With the opening of navigation, mining takes a spurt. The event is, therefore, one of the most important in the North. Men who contribute to the pool are permitted to guess the time the ice goes out. The man coming nearest the actual time wins the pot. In case two guess the same time, the pot is divided. This year the Cold Deck and Big Nugget districts are forming a pool of their own. It will run close to thirty thousand dollars, for money is coming in from many Outside points. The instant the break-up occurs this year this station will be on the air so that you may hear the whistles blowing. In fact, we are connected with the wire that has been strung across the river."

Mike McClure's lips moved. "It'd be great if a man could hear the ice pop an' crack. Some day suthin'll be invented so a man can. It won't be in my time, though."

Sport Corbin handed Mike a harmonica. "Give us a little tune, Mike," he said. "You've made many an hour pass with your old mouth organ. Give us 'The Old Gray Mare' or 'Old Folks at Home.'"

"It ought to be 'Old Folks in the Home,'" Mike muttered.

"I'll fill your pipe for you," Bart Mason offered.

"Don't feel like smoking. Ice pool, eh? Lordy, I'd like to make one more guess and then die!"

"You blamed fool kid," snorted Sport Corbin, "why not make one more guess and live? You're twenty year younger'n me. Of course, the first hundred years are the hardest. Get hold of yourself or the first thing you know you'll be cashin' in in the prime o' life." Sport turned to Bart Mason. "Hand me that tobacco can, will yuh?"

The old fellow shook the can. 'Empty," he grunted. He called the nurse. "How much tobacco money have we got left?"

"A hundred dollars and thirty-five cents remain in the fund, Mr. Corbin. Is the can empty?"

"Yes," he answered.

Sport Corbin continued to ponder. Had he been less the sport and more the tightwad he might have been worth a million dollars, but from youth he had always taken a chance. A sure thing held no charm for him. "I don't know how you boys feel," he said abruptly, "but I'm willin' to spend my share of the tobacco fund bettin' on the ice pool!"

Absolute silence greeted this statement. Bart Mason was first to break the silence. "Me, too. But remember, Poke Tupper and Hardrock Shipley keep the tobacco fund going and they might kick about us."

"Not that pair of walruses," Sport interrupted. "They'll say 'more power to you!' and send us another hundred. Listen——" And here the hope that never dies in the breast of the true miner came to the surface. "We might win! Here's a lot of us what know all about the break-up. Our guess ought to be better'n most."

They called in the superintendent.

"Take this hundred dollars and send it to the ice-pool committee——" Sport began.

The superintendent smiled. "Now, boys, you can't waste your tobacco money that way. The tobacco'll soothe your nerves.

"So'll bettin' on the pool soothe our nerves," Sport answered.

"And if you don't have tobacco, there'll be no living with you."

"Yep," Sport admitted, "that's true! And if we don't bet on the break-up there'll be no livin' with us. We're old, and we're sot in our ways."

The superintendent was good-natured but firm.

"I'm sort of responsible for that fund," he said. "Poke Tupper and Hardrock donate several hundred dollars a year with the understanding that it won't be spent sending some miner looking for gold, but for candy, tobacco, and such things. I can't turn it over to you without their consent."

"I always said you never had any sense," Sport Corbin shouted. "But it ain't your fault you was born that way. Send Poke Tupper a message, askin', can we bet on the break-up."

"I'll do that!"

In the meantime, after much talking and two arguments that nearly ended in fist fights, a number of guesses were set down on paper—so sure were the old boys that Hardrock and Poke would agree! Two days later the message arrived. It read:

If you are willing to go without tobacco, go ahead and bet on the break-up.

POKE AND HARDROCK.

"That settles that," Sport grumbled. "Still, I kinda had a hunch they'd send the tobacco anyway. I can stand it." He raised his voice, "How about it, boys?"

"Bet on the break-up," they answered. Sport turned to the superintendent. "Get our money and guesses in as quick as you can. It's understood this is a partnership affair. One loses, all lose; one wins, all win!"

The hundred-year-old sport turned to Mike McClure. "That ought to bring you back to life! Heck, when I was your age I had a girl and I could dance all night long in rubber boots! How about a little tune?"

McClure put the harmonica to his lips and played, but the old zest wasn't there. The man who could cheer up others, who had as a younger man made life bearable on the trail, who had made the dying hours of others easier, could not cheer himself when spring came and he realized he could no longer take the trail as of old. Winter did not matter—a man was cooped up anyway.

And while the miners loudly told him to get some sense into his head, nevertheless, every man knew how Mike felt and sympathized with him.

Mike McClure was failing. The doctor tried to rouse him, but without success. As a last resort, Sport Corbin was called to Mike's bedside. Despite their difference in age they had been partners of the trail in the Yukon stampede. A stronge bond of affection existed between the two men. Sport blinked, then he lowered his voice. Kidding or loud words accompanied by slaps on the back would never do.

"Well, Mike," said Sport in a low tone, "they said you'd lost interest. I guess you have, Mike. But it ain't for long. You'll come back strong."

"What's the use, Sport? I'm just a burden and ain't getting any fun out of life. Why drag on? If I could hear the ice go each year it wouldn't be so hard. Remember how I used to stand on the bank and listen to the grindin' and watch it move?"

"Yeah. You used to be solemn as a owl!"

"Yeah! I was solemn. It made me think. Another year was ahead of me. I had a lot of things to do and I wanted to do 'em. But here——"

"You've got a lot of things to do," said Sport encouragingly. "If you hit the last trail, Mike, you're going to leave a big hole in the Home. Admit-

tin' we don't figure high in the scheme o' things, we're danged important to each other. You know how it is when they build a buildin' Outside? There's rubbish scattered about; odds and ends left over. Sort of necessary they was in the buildin' but most people don't think of it that way. We're the odds and ends of a new land that's just been started. It won't be finished for a hundred years, maybe a thousand. We're the molds of the concrete foundation. So get that failure out of your mind, Mike. We're howlin' successes here at the Home."

Mike smiled and shook his head. In his own mind he had weighed everything and formed a conclusion. Self-destruction was unthinkable, but why struggle against fate? He closed his eyes.

Sport Corbin waited a moment, then slipped away. "I think I'm licked," he muttered; "really licked for the first time in my life. I've handled him before!"

He walked over to the radio. A twist of the dials would bring in music, but it might tune out Cold Deck. He wanted everything ready the instant the ice started to go so that nothing would be missed. He had it on full power. Even as he stood there, a voice said:

"Stand-by! Ten miles up the river the ice is beginning to move." Then there was silence!

Sport Corbin turned the radio on full power and left it. Then he went across to Mike's room. "It's midnight, Mike. The ice will go to-day."

"And I'll go with it, Sport. I don't know what happens when a feller dies. But if I can go where I want to, I'll mush for the river country and I'll watch the ice go. I'll stand there and listen and—think! Huh? How's that? What'd you say, Sport?"

"I said things are ready down there at Cold Deck. What time did you put down at the exact minute of the break-up?"

"Two thirty o'clock this morning. Pretty soon, now!" He laughed queerly. "It'd be funny, Sport, if I'd die and then the next day you'd hear that I'd won!" Again came that queer laugh.

"They're ready," Sport repeated. "I can just see it. The tripod is out on the river, with the wire strung just below. The wire connects up with a whistle and clock. This year they've got the radio fixed up with it. Pretty soon the old river let's go. The tripod smashes against the wire, the clock stops, and the whistle starts. Then noise breaks loose!"

Sport Corbin talked on and on. Somebody had told him that life is lowest between two and three o'clock in the morning. He hoped to pull Mike by the fatal period.

Presently the doctor entered and looked down at the patient. He touched Sport on the arm.

"How is he?" Sport inquired when they were out of the room.

"Dying! It's queer the way we humans are made up, but the break-up which used to renew his vigor every year is now killing him. There is nothing organically wrong, Sport. It's all in his mind. Whatever happens must come from within. There's nothing we can do."

"I'm going to stick around," Sport announced. "I'll watch him and—gosh, it's two fifteen already! Why the heck can't that ice go?"

He tiptoed into the room and waited for the minutes to drag. His old partner—as good a man as ever pulled on a frozen moccasin—was dying, and nothing wrong, except that something big had been taken from his life! Sport would have laughed at a younger man.

Two thirty!

Sport Corbin looked at the clock.

He held his breath a moment, half expecting to hear the scream of the siren. The hands moved slowly on, and no sound came.

Mike's eyes opened. "What time is it? Don't fool me, Sport!"

Sport had prepared to do that very thing, but now he changed his mind. "I won't! It's a little after two thirty!"

"How much?"

"Just about a minute——"

From the loud speaker came the wail of a siren.

"Sport! Sport! Sport, are you there? Or have I—er—died an——"

"I'm here, Mike! Look! See me. Here I am. It's Sport Corbin! Look! See my old mug, right above your face. You ain't dreamin' things, Mike. It's the break-up. It's coming over the radio from Cold Deck. Ain't that natural? Hear the other whistles coming in, and there goes the old church bell! It ain't no way for a church bell to ring, but it's the break-up. Hey! Mike! Don't you hear it? The boys are all gettin' out of bed. Hear that poppin'? It's the miners shootin' off their guns. They've taken the microphone outside now."

A new roar was filling the room. Some sounds were distant; others were close. Old eyes were closed and before them, now that they had the sound, came old scenes. Men firing their guns into the air and howling like mad; dogs by the score, not knowing what it was all about, running in a panic. Here and there a dog would howl.

"Listen to that, Mike. Here that husky howl! The old river's moving. There'll be open water soon! Listen —to—that!"

Mike McClure listened. A grinding sound came from the loud speaker, and it was not static. Crunching, crumbling, grinding, power beyond the comprehension of man.

"That's the ice, Mike! Hear it! Winter's licked! The ice is going. Hear it grind! They've got the microphone right down on the bank." Sport pounded the palm of his hand with his fist. "And if that fool announcer moves it, I'll kill him! Let it grind; that's what we want to hear!"

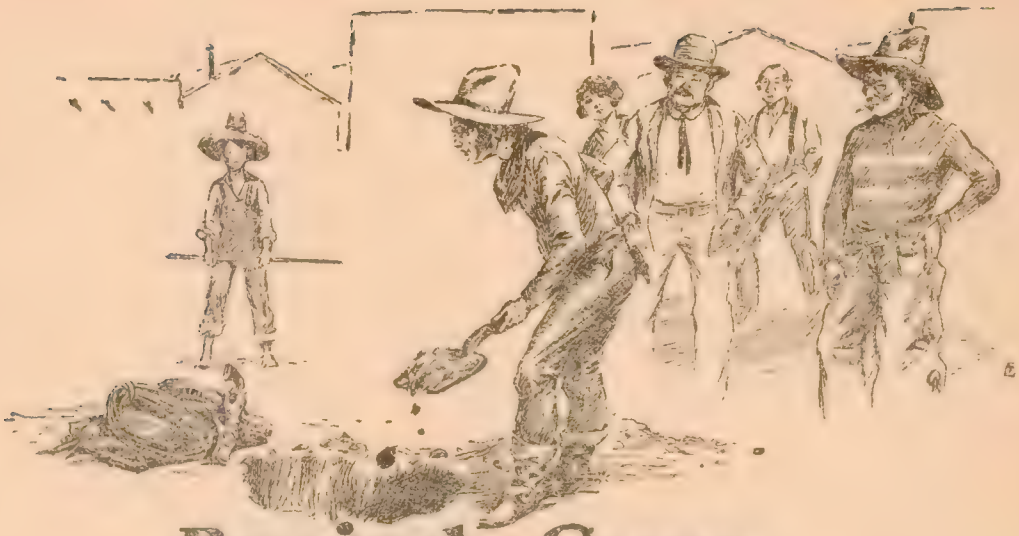
Half an hour passed. Then came the announcer's voice:

"The microphone has been on the river bank. That sound you hear is the grinding of countless tons of ice moving downstream in great blocks. It is a thrilling sight. The break-up occurred at two thirty-one o'clock. No man had put down that exact time and so the pool will go to the nearest guesser. In this case it happens to be two groups. The boys at the Placer Home guessed two thirty; Hardrock Shipley and Poke Tupper guessed two thirty-two. The purse will be divided between—how's that? Just a moment! Correction. Hardrock Shipley and Poke Tupper insist that they made a mistake; that the purse will go intact to the boys at the Home. It is the first thing they've agreed on in years!"

Sport Corbin pulled the plug, then walked back into Mike's room.

"Well, ain't that just like Hardrock and Poke?" he exclaimed. "Heck, we've got the tobacco question settled for all time to come! The int'rest will keep us in tobacco, and a few good movies besides. Down on the river there's open water by this time in spots. And you——"

"Open water for me, Sport! When they can bring a break-up right to a man's bed, he's a fool for not hangin' on just to see what they'll do next. Bring me that old mouth organ. Maybe if I fuss around with it a little bit I can pan out a tune."



Buried Guns

By Dee Murto

Author of "The Rattler," etc.

INTO the Bear Creek country Steve O'Malley wandered from no one knew where. Steve was young. His blue eyes sparkled with life, his cheeks were bronzed, and he walked with the unintentional swagger of the bronc peeler. That much Conifer, capital of the Bear Creek country, knew—and that was all it knew.

"I'm lookin' fer a job," Steve had said, the first day he struck town, and that was all the explanation he gave of his arrival. Old-timers took a quick look at the fancy, pearl-handed six-gun that nested in his holster, and decided that they shouldn't ask questions. But the kid seemed peaceable enough.

"Well!" exclaimed Ronny Muller, the new deputy sheriff in Conifer, as soon as he saw Steve, "that feller thar, why, dang his hide! he's just a kid, ain't he? That's all—a kid."

But Ronny's excitement was too apparent to escape notice. The bystanders asked him what he thought Steve was—a horse or a cow or a coyote, maybe? Ronny flushed at that.

"Waal—nuthin'," said the deputy sheriff, shortly, "exceptin' he looks like a feller—a bad hombre—I knowed once. He kinda startled me fer a minnit; but, shucks, I see now he's only a dog-gone kid—but he sure resembles—some one I knowed!"

No more questions were asked. Conifer wasn't used to asking questions. But Ronny stood aloof whenever Steve O'Malley drew close. Steve didn't see Ronny at all, but the bystanders could see that Ronny kept staring at Steve, as one might stare at a ghost.

"Any one here got a job open?" asked Steve, as he slipped into the group where Ronny waited. "I want a job."

"Whar yuh from, son?" asked Joe Myers.

"Squaw Mountain country!" said the youth.

"Ever been down on Cherry Creek?" asked Ronny Muller, in a cool voice, and the stranger looked up and shook his head.

"No—never have!" he answered, honestly enough.

But jobs were not plentiful around

Conifer, and so the kid didn't get settled very quickly. He put up at the Lone Spruce Hotel, put his horse in the feed stables, and started to hang around town waiting for an opening. The kid was quiet. He had a sunny smile—but his presence in Conifer annoyed the new deputy sheriff considerably.

"I'd swear," he said, time and again, to the townsmen, "that that stranger was a bad aigg—a feller I knowed once—ef he was jus' about fifteen years older. An' still——"

"Who was this bad hombre, Ronny?"

"A blamed outlaw, guilty o' every crime on the whole calendar," said Ronny, vehemently; "that's all he was!"

"Was he ketched?"

"Why, no; he wasn't ketched."

It was plain that the kid's continued visit in Conifer was sure worrying Muller. The new deputy, who was surly anyway, became surlier as days went by. He kept his eyes on Steve O'Malley, evidently waiting for the stranger to make some move that might justify the law in taking a hand. But the kid was plainly not a desperado. He was not an outlaw, despite his make-up.

"Say, son," said Muller, finally, to the young man, "ef I ain't sayin' too much—I think mebbe yuh better git a job out on a ranch an' leave town. Conifer ain't strong fer loafers."

The boy stared at Ronny's flushed face.

"Waal," he admitted, "I am runnin' short o' change—do yuh know whar I could kinda hock this?"

The speaker made a move as if to draw his fancy, pearl-handled gun, but Ronny Muller was faster. He had his gun drawn before the kid's fingers had actually closed on the pearl handle.

"Why," said the kid, "I ain't——"

The deputy sheriff snarled

"I ain't takin' no chances, either, yuh!" he said. "Yuh has the misfortune to look like a feller I knowed once—a bandit that was a holy terror—see? That's why I don't like yuh, mebbe; that's why I say yuh better drift."

Well, shortly after that Steve O'Malley did drift. He got a job with "Old Man" Mills, who was generally supposed to be a bit crazy. Old Man Mills lived on an isolated mountain ranch west of Conifer and ran a few hundred head of stock. How the young man ever got hitched up with the old one was more than Conifer could guess, but Ronny Muller laughed when he heard it.

"Thar's a fine pair!" he snorted, disgustedly, "that smart-Aleck kid an' Old Man Mills, who is nutty as a pine cone!"

Again the old-timers in Conifer smiled behind their hands. They knew why Muller didn't like Old Man Mills. It was because the old rancher had tried every way possible to prevent Sheriff "Slim" Heath, at Shawnee, the county seat, from appointing Ronny as deputy for the Conifer district. Old Man Mills contended that Heath should have named a local man, rather than a stranger, as Muller was. But Muller had helped Heath to get elected, and so Muller was appointed.

O'Malley seemed to get along fine with Old Man Mills, however, and that was more than any other bronc peeler had ever accomplished in the memory of Conifer. The kid stayed on and on at the Mills' ranch and occasionally he came into town with his employer. On such occasions he would make it a point to see the deputy sheriff.

"Waal, I still got my job, Muller," he would remark, "so don't try to draw no gun on me to-day."

And Muller was easily aroused.

"Yuh ever try any monkeyshines on me, kid, an' I'll show yuh how fast I kin draw—git that?"

And so bad blood developed between Muller and Steve in earnest. Those

who saw the feud grow took it on themselves to go out of their way to warn the kid that Muller was a hard man.

"He kin draw a gun faster'n lightnin'!" said "Grandpaw" McMeel, to the kid, one day, "so don't try nuthin' sonny. A lot o' us don't like him any more than yuh do, neither!"

And there matters rested, for a time. But the kid's eyes grew brighter, as the weeks went on, and he came to town more often. On one visit he saw that Muller was wearing a pair of six-guns now, and he laughed right in Muller's face when they met that day.

"Kin you draw both guns equally fast?" he asked.

"Say—yuh wait an' see!" retorted Muller, grimly.

But there was no gun play then. The kid explained matters to his friends in town later.

"That foolish deputy has it in fer me because I looks like somebody that musta given him a beatin', once," said Steve; "that's the only way I figger it. But he hadn't better get too hard with me or I might try to beat him to the draw."

"Ssh! Now son," they told him, "don't be foolish! Muller ain't a very sociable feller, but he's sure death with a gat! Yuh leave him be—he always sulks, anyhow!"

"Yes?"

"Yes—ever since he came here two years ago!"

The months rolled by and the feud between Muller and O'Malley grew. Muller got so that he would not recognize the kid when the latter came into Conifer. As for Steve, he would just glare at the black-browed deputy and let it go at that. Folks said it was really better that the two didn't speak, for in that way there was less danger of an argument leading to a duel, but the more observant townsfolk noticed that both the kid and the deputy kept their hands "free and easy" and ready near their holsters, whenever they were within a block of each other. Such action meant that some day the feud would flare forth in gunfire.

"Steve," said Grandpaw McMeel, the town busybody, "I ain't hankerin' to see yuh shot down in cold blood—yuh leave Muller alone; don't try to draw agin' him—he's sure death and lightnin'."

"I guess I know that—by this time!" said the kid.

And then fate seemed to take a hand in the proceedings. Old Man Mills came into town, shortly after, bemoaning the fact that Steve had been injured. His horse had thrown him and Steve had landed on his head and one shoulder and was laid up in bed.

"Yuh have a doctor, Mills?"

"No—I doctors him myself."

"Mebbe yuh better have a doctor look——"

"No—he'll come through nice," said Mills. "He's kinda out o' his head now—but he'll come through."

It was sad news in Conifer, where Steve was generally liked. Only Muller, the deputy, grinned. He would have grinned if word had come that Steve had been killed. And it was old Grandpaw McMeel who took the deputy to task for that smile, later.

"Ronny," said McMeel, "I seen yuh grin when yuh heard about that pore kid, Steve, bein' hurt. Was that nice, I asks yuh?"

Muller smiled again.

"I couldn't help it, Grandpaw," he said, "that smile jus' come natural as yuh please—mebbe it wasn't intentional!"

"Wasn't intentional?" whooped McMeel. "Say, deputy, don't try to kid me. I'm too old fer that kind o' horseplay. What in heck has yuh got agin' that kid, Steve?"

Muller looked thoughtful for a moment before he answered.

"Nuthin'," he replied, slowly, "that is—exceptin'——"

"Exceptin' what?"

"Exceptin' that he sure looks like a feller I was mad with, once," said Muller, "a blamed outlaw—that's who he was! An' each time I sees this Steve bird I'm reminded o' that other guy, yuh understand? It's kinda hard to draw a line betwixt 'em, ol'-timer, betwixt this Steve kid an' the outlaw I knowed once."

That was all the satisfaction Grandpaw McMeel got. It was all the satisfaction Conifer got—until, one week later, a paid notice appeared in the weekly issue of the Conifer *Clarion*. The advertisement caused instant consternation in Conifer. It read:

Notice: Having been injured when throwed off my horse recently, am quitting punching and am going East. Will dispose of my chaps, rope, and fancy pearl-handled six-gun, in Conifer, in public, next Friday morning at ten o'clock. STEVE O'MALLEY.

There was a lot of conjecture as to what the advertisement actually meant. Some thought the kid cowhand was attempting, in his crude way, to advertise a public auction of his belongings. But others, remembering that Old Man Mills had doctored the kid after his fall, decided that the doctoring had been inefficient and that the notice in the paper proved that point.

"Didn't Ol' Man Mills tell us that the kid had been throwed on his haid an' shoulder, hurting both?" asked Grandpaw McMeel. "An' didn't he say he was doctorin' Steve hisself? An' ain't Ol' Man Mills kinda queer? Waal, I'll say this—the pore kid got a crack on the haid in that fall an' it's affected him—that's all!"

"He always was crazy, ef that's what yuh mean," put in Deputy Muller, who heard McMeels' remark, "crazy fer hangin' around this town when he must know that every time I sees him his face is like a red rag to a bull, so to speak!"

"I'm beginnin' to suspect yuh're crazy, too!" said Grandpaw.

"Not so yuh could notice it," said Muller, loftily.

The notice in the paper aroused all the curious in Conifer. Folks were out in the streets and on the plaza that Friday morning, waiting to see what was going to happen. Nobody knew where the kid would appear; whether he would try to auction his stuff from the courthouse steps, as some did, or in the plaza, as others had done; or whether he would just give his belongings away, or pawn them, or what? The notice hadn't been very clear. It might mean anything. There might be some fun. So every Tom, Dick, and Harry was out, waiting.

And they didn't have so long to wait that morning, either. Promptly at ten o'clock Steve came clattering up the main street, with Old Man Mills by his side. They came straight toward the plaza and both dismounted. The old man crossed the street to a hardware store, while Steve held the horses and looked around him.

There was a good-sized crowd at the plaza, and it was growing rapidly.

"Hullo, Steve," called out Grandpaw McMeel, cordially. "Ain't seen yuh since yuh was hurt—how yuh feelin', kid?"

The kid put a hand to his forehead before he answered.

"Not so good," he complained, softly, "I guess I was purty bad hurt in that tumble I had. I—I've sold my hoss to Mr. Mills—an' the rest o' my stuff—waal—I——"

"Yuh gonna auction 'em off, Steve?"

"Auction 'em off?" asked the kid, blankly, "no!"

"Offer fer private sale, eh?"

"No!"

"Waal, then, what are yuh gonna do——"

At that point Old Man Mills came trotting across the street, carrying a pick and a shovel. The kid took the pick from him solemnly, without a word. He started to break up the ground in front of him. The crowd closed in, wondering. Once, when the kid lifted his eyes, his glance caught the glare from the eyes of Deputy Sheriff Ronny Muller. After that Steve did not look up at all. He used the pick for three or four minutes, perhaps, then he reached for the shovel. He worked quickly—while the crowd held its breath.

"Say!" broke in Muller, as the excavation work continued, and the kid had a small hole scooped out of the ground, "this here is public property, yuh two fellers—what's the idear?"

The kid looked up quickly at that challenge.

Instinctively, Muller's hand had dropped to his holster.

"I said in the paper that I was quittin' punchin', account o' bad injuries," said Steve, in a dazed sort of way, while Old Man Mills nodded his head vigorously, "an' I'm gonna dispose o' my chaps, an' rope, an' gun—see? They're — dead —to—me—from—now —on! See? I aim to bury 'em here, that's all, then I'm goin' away."

Old Man Mills put in his dime's worth of remarks.

"He was hurt on the haid," he said, sadly.

It was all very apparent now. Muller might have brushed forward and ordered the digging and burial to cease. but those around him held him back with their glances. Poor Steve! He had surely gone crazy—crazy as his eccentric old boss, Mills. Bury his cowboy stuff, eh? Well, rather sad at that Old Grandpaw McMeel drew out an enormous red handkerchief and used it vigorously. Others made dabs at their eyes. Still others turned their heads away.

Steve went on digging—silently, swiftly.

Then, while the speechless throng watched, Steve handed the shovel back to Mills. That done, the kid unbuckled his cartridge belt, with its holster and the fancy, pearl-handled gun. He eased it to the ground. He pulled off his chaps and knelt and placed them folded, in the ground. He put his coiled lariat on top of the chaps. Last of all, he laid his belt and holstered six-gun on top of the lariat. Then he stood up and looked down into the little grave for a full minute. Then he took the shovel, and tenderly—as tenderly as such a thing can ever be done—he started filling in the hole with the damp, fresh earth. A few turned away at that stage of the game, looking at each other and tapping their heads significantly. Yes, the poor kid was certainly out of his mind! No question about it. Deputy Muller, seeing the motions of the others, and still glaring at the kid, decided that Steve was a victim of his fall.

But the deputy waited until the last shovel of earth had been smoothed down on the little mound. The kid straightened up.

"Aw—shucks!" exclaimed Muller, in derision, and with a shrug of his shoulders he plunged his hands deep into his trouser pockets and turned away lazily, in supreme scorn.

And at that moment things happened suddenly.

The kid's air of sad detachment seemed to drop away from him like a cloak. He straightened up in an instant. The shovel dropped from his hands. Out from a shoulder holster came a shining six-gun.

"Yuh—Muller—hands up!"

Muller whirled, his hands coming out of his pockets, but they went no farther. He saw the gun in the kid's hand—apparently the gun he had just seen safely buried. He saw the fiery

look in the kid's eyes. And he lifted his hands well above his head, at the same time speaking out of the corner of his twisted mouth.

"Grab him, somebody—he's crazy!" he cried.

But nobody grabbed Steve. Nobody could move. The sudden turn of events had taken the whole outfit by surprise. The kid advanced on the white-faced Muller and poked his gun into Muller's stomach. The next second a pair of handcuffs flashed in the sun. And the second after that the bracelets clicked around Muller's wrists. With a deft movement, O'Malley relieved Muller of both his guns. They dropped to the ground and the youth kicked them in different directions.

"Yuh won't need them guns no more, Miller, alias Muller," said the kid, in an exulting voice, "not whar yuh're go-in'—look!"

The kid turned back the edge of his vest. A badge glittered there, and Muller's face went even whiter than it had been.

"I'm arrestin' yuh fer murder—fer the murder o' Dave Stearns, on Cherry Creek, ten years ago!" said the kid, briskly. "I'm Dave's son—Steve Stearns; I've trailed yuh plenty, hombre. I was commissioned a deputy down home a year ago jus' to git yuh, but I never thought to find yuh hidin' behind a badge yuhrself! That's what took me so long! An' when I did find yuh, I seen yuh kinda recognized my dead father in me, an' I didn't dare to take no chances havin' yuh beat me to the draw."

The kid relaxed and grinned coldly.

"But thar's more ways than one o' ketchin' a murderer," he concluded, "an' I reckon I've just demonstrated that. After I see yuh git justice on Cherry Creek, Miller, I'll come back here an' go to punchin' keows ag'in for Mr. Mills, who helped me plan this way o' nabbin' yuh! But before we leaves I guess I might as well dig up that other six-gun o' mine, an' the chaps, an' the lariat. Hey, Mills, hold yuhr gat on this hombre after yuh hand me that shovel!"

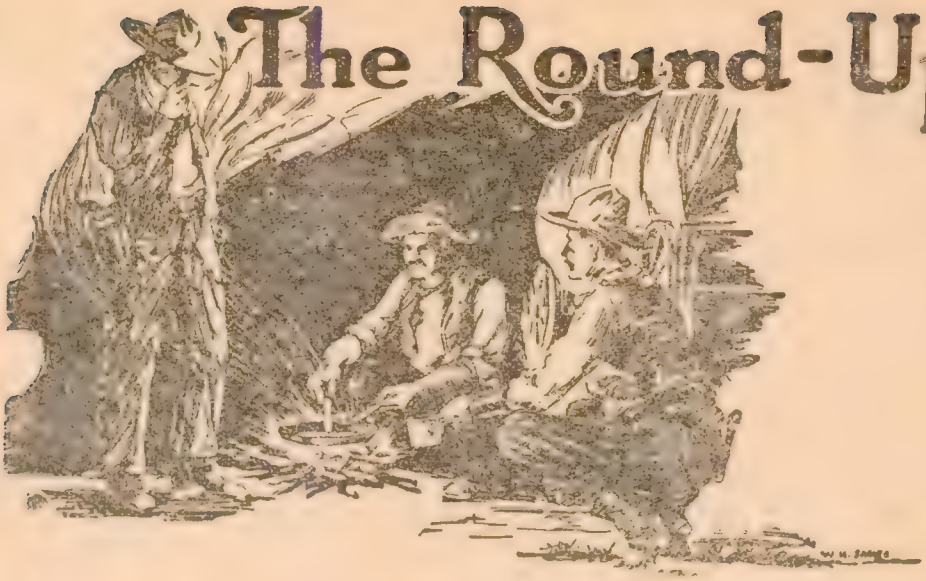
Contentment

By Hastings L. Herring

WHEN mystic shadows hover near
And dusk begins to grow,
I lay me down on grama grass,
Here in the Western glow.
I watch the stars as, one by one,
They stud the velvet sky.
I feel the warm winds gently blow—
The sting of alkali.

And from afar the coyote's cry
Floats through the evening breeze.
Huge mountains pierce the rays of light,
Like dark and silent trees.
I draw my blanket close and, as
My embers lower burn,
I find a world of peacefulness
God's men, alone, discern.

The Round-Up



WELL, folks, how are you all, this fine May morning? Sure is great weather, we'll say. But, just the same, that fire still feels mighty good after the sun goes down.

Now, before we get down to other matters, we'd like to tell you that next week we're goin' to introduce a newcomer to you. We know that he'll get a regular Western welcome, and we can tell you right now that he'll deserve it. The newcomer, he's an author man, he is; name of Apple—A. E.—and he's done a complete novel for your edification and entertainment. It's called "The New-Timer."

We think that Apple has done a good job, and we are sure hopin' and prayin' —and so is Apple—that you'll think so, too. Apple sure knows his stuff; there is no doubt of that. And he has proved many times that he can tell a *story*. In recent years he has been doin' exciting mystery and detective yarns—dandies, too—but he wanted to turn back to his first love, the one that made his reputation: the story laid outdoors.

Well, look out particular for that story, please, and after you've read it we sure will appreciate it—and so will Apple—if you'll just send us in a few lines of comment as to how you rate our new friend's work.

Comes now a long shot. It's from a gent in Honduras, C. A.

"BOSS AND FOLKS: For several years, I have sat back and listened to these arguments, pro and con the automatic and the six-shooter. Practically all of these arguments are sound, in my opinion, and I am still waiting to be convinced that either gun is any better than the other, when used for the purpose for which it was designed.

"Let me go on record as stating that I believe that each gun was made for a certain purpose, and, for that purpose, it cannot be excelled.

"To summarize the points of a six-shooter:

"1. If a misfire occurs all you need to do is pull it again, whereas with the automatic the slide must be marked with the other hand.

"2. I find that nearly all concede that it is faster on the draw and hangs better in the holster than the .45 automatic. I never tie my holster down, nor do I fasten the gun, and have never had it fall out.

"3. The natives here soon master the .38 special double-action six-shooter but experience difficulties with .44 or .45 and also with the auto. Therefore my conclusion is that an amateur can more easily master this model than the others.

"In winding up this long-winded debate, let's just say, 'Each man to his own choice, and each gun for its purpose.'

"At a later date, I may decide to get into the argument of small bore, high velocity, versus the big bores. I have witnessed the effects of both on human flesh and bones, under various conditions, and have very decided views on that subject.

"Also, a couple of incidents concerning automatics in the hands of gunmen have come to my mind. These, if stated, would sure get a round of hearty cheers from the automatic 'crank.'

"Well, fellows, I'm sorry if I have tired you, loading you with all this chatter, but I felt that I just had to have my say.

"As I'm not settled, my address can't be stated, and my name doesn't matter. I'm sure you fellows wouldn't ask it of me, but when we become better acquainted, perhaps I will enlighten you."

Bob Case, just you listen to this, and then don't go and get all set up, just go and get your typewriter and get goin' on the best story you've ever written. And after you get goin', you stick to it till it's finished. And after it's finished, you buy yourself an envelope, and you buy yourself a stamp, and you send it pronto to this here old gent as edits WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. And then this here old ed, he'll send a nice fat check, right straight back to you in your State of Washington home.

"Old Crocker," H. A. Lanier, Okeechobee, Florida, will now pin the rose on you, Bob:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Push them gents back a little. If they get farther that way, they won't be so far this way. You want your readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE to tell which of the writers they like best, so I first want to say that no two would agree, as some likes gun work and others like rough stuff.

"But for myself, Robert Ormond Case can't be beat, telling the real outdoor stuff just like it looks as per 'The Fence Across the Canyon' and all his other work. The reason I like him is that he doesn't ruin his story by repeating the terrible profanity that some chaps use under such conditions and he tells it so that one feels as if he were right along on the trip. Where a cuss needs killing, Case always takes him away to bump him off. Give us some more of Windy, Lonesome, and the Widow."

Joe E. Miller, Portland, Oregon, on the subject of wild horses has something to say.

"BOSS AND FOLKS: In the February 25th issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, on page one hundred and twenty, is a short article on 'Death of Washington Wild Horses.' It says that the wild horses of Washington and Oregon are facing death from thirst, and also that the wild horses have no commercial value.

"Here is the truth about the wild horses in this part of the West: They are increasing so fast that there is danger, if they are not killed off in the next few years, that they will take full possession of the cattle and sheep ranges. Just last week there were shipped from Mountain Home, Idaho, thirty car loads—almost nine hundred

wild horses—to Butte, Montana, and Portland, Oregon.

"As for wild horses dying of thirst, that sounds rather strange to me, for the wild horses of the wide-open ranges, are just like our Western buffalo of years ago; they have their water trails, just as the extinct buffalo had. This is not hearsay, but the actual truth, as I have seen hundreds of wild horses on their water trail, that always led to a small river or stream. If necessary, wild horses will go twenty or thirty miles on their trail to water.

"These are only a few friendly words, and I don't want you to think I'm findin' fault."

THE WEST

And What Do YOU Know About It?

1. What kind of cakes are relished most by Westerners?..... 2. By what other name are they better known?..... 3. When a horse has low withers, what piece of harness must be attached to the saddle?..... 4. In what year was Alaska bought from Russia?..... 5. Why was this transaction called "Seward's folly?"..... 6. What plant is grown in almost all parts of the United States and is excellent forage?..... 7. The rarest color that a foal may have at birth is..... 8. What color horse turns white with age?..... 9. How may one cure a horse of shying?..... 10. What may any Indian village of the southwestern United States be called?.....

Answers to last week's questions: 1. At Three Saints' Bay on Kodiak Island. 2. Russians. 3. Trading. 4. One having a black line running down the middle of his back. 5. Buckskin. 6. 1912. 7. 1838. 8. California. 9. A combination of dried meat, fat, and sometimes dried fruit, powdered or compressed into cakes. 10. Because it is easily carried in a minimum of space.

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

FALSE-FRONTED, wooden buildings! They belong to the West—for there is no other setting, no other background for false-fronted, wooden buildings, except the sagebrush flat! Main Street, lined with false-fronted buildings battered by the icy winds of winter and besieged by the burning sandstorms of summer! That, folks, is the West!

Let this Gangster tell you-all about Bonanza, one of the little towns of eastern Oregon that has a false-fronted Main Street and sits in the middle of a sagebrush flat.

Dear Big Sister and the Owl: Have crossed the footbridge over the famous Lost River and walked the short distance to the post office to tell you-all about our village, which is typically Western, with a scattering of false-fronted, wooden buildings on each side of Main Street. The town, which is very much alive, braces itself against the fierce winds of winter and the fiercer sand-laden winds of summer, and is right in the middle of a sagebrush flat. Its name is Bonanza!

Bonanza is in the eastern part of Oregon. The two parts, eastern and western, are as distinctly separate and different as two worlds. Out here the climate is dry and high, and sagebrush plains roll away to juniper foothills, that in turn give way to lofty mountains. A high range of mountains separate eastern from western Oregon, and the western section is lower and damper, with more foliage, more truck farms, and a sea coast. In eastern Oregon we have cattle ranching, lumbering, and sheep raising.

Although one would be led to think from the name that Bonanza is a mining town, there are no mines here. Bonanza is so-called because of the large and numerous springs that bubble up everlastingly from the sandy formation of the flat and that join Lost River here at the town.

My husband is engaged in the lumbering business here at present, but we aim to go to western Oregon next year, to stay. I have lived all over Oregon and California and Nevada, but western Oregon and a little gray home in the West is my ambition. I have cooked in logging camps for fire fighters. I have "picked" eggs in a government fish hatchery, and have had many other occupations. Have ridden horseback and roughed it all over the mountains of southern Oregon. Have hiked and snowshoed and boated.

Now, my request is this: I want Gangsters near my own age, which is twenty-six, to write to me. I'd like to hear from Canada, South America, Alaska, and all the other interesting and far-away places. Wish to exchange snapshots and to hear all about farming, stock raising, lumbering, et cetera. In turn I'll write to you-all about Crater Lake, Oregon Caves, Red Woods, mining, lumbering, hunting, ranching, cowboys, Indi-

ans, or whatever you like! I'm just another Oregonian, folks, who asks not to be forgotten. MRS. SHARLET V. SLACK.

Box 126, Bonanza, Oregon.

In the old days.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: There used to be such a thing as a Stockmen's Association in the old days. And there was the Sheepmen's Association, too. What has become of them? Are they still in existence? I'd like to know particularly about the Sheepmen's Association, for I'd like to get some information about herding sheep in Colorado and Wyoming. K. C. PERRY.

811 North Nineteenth Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

Frontier town.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Prescott is an old frontier town and I can't understand why some Gangster who is good at painting word pictures hasn't *done* Prescott, Arizona. I'm not very good at describing natural-beauty spots, but I have a good camera, folks, that does wonders for me! Come on, hombres, and let me tell you about Arizona with snapshots. J. B.

Box 36, Prescott, Arizona.

Is Sander a cow town?

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I once worked on a ranch and performed some of the tasks of the cowboy. I'm anxious to return to the ranch life, and want some information about the West. I've chosen Sander, Wyoming, as the town I'd like to head for, and I want to know whether there are many cattle ranches around the town of Sander.

I'm a fair rider and roper and like nothing better than herding cattle. Now, folks, who are the prominent cattlemen around Sander? What are the names of the ranches? I'll be waiting to hear from you-all, hombres. GARLAND C.

Care of The Tree.

Hiking West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am planning on a long hike West this year and would sure like to hear from any and all real hikers who've been through the mill and can give me information that would be of value to a novice. My main worry, is how to keep down the weight of my pack and still be comfortable at night. Come on, you veterans of the trail. Let a would-be hiker profit by your experiences. L. L. C.

3031 Kenwood Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Far from the home range.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We call Tucson, Arizona, home, folks, so we're far from the home range. My wife and I were both raised in Arizona, and we can tell you-all something about California, New Mexico, and the Mexican border, as well as about our own State. We are returning to Arizona, via the "all-year" route, before long.

MR. AND MRS. J. J.

Care of The Tree.

"The Hollow Tree badge is attractive, but the main thing is the idea behind it—the friendship that it stands for," says R. F., of Columbus, Ohio.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

Native of Wyoming.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was born and raised in the wide, open spaces. In fact, I am a native of Wyoming, so is it any wonder that I do not like the city with its millions of people? I am here in Los Angeles at present, but I do not want to make my home in the city. I wonder if any of the Gangsters could tell me where I could homestead, where would be a good place to raise cattle? I am twenty-five, and husky enough to stand the hardships. R. G. WRIGHT.

818 West Eighteenth Street, Los Angeles, California.

The Tennessee hills.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a small farmer struggling along among the Tennessee hills. This is the western part of the State. The variety of the soil and the natural resources of Tennessee are such that Tennesseans could live in pretty good style if an impassable

wall were built about the State. However, I didn't join the old Holla merely to sing the praises of sunny Tennessee. I'd like to hear from the older members of the Gang.

A. T. SMITH.

Route 1, Box 75, Lexington, Tennessee.

A beginner's ranch.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is a lovely spot—not at all impressive as to acreage, but just a nice, small ranch for a beginner in ranching to undertake. Our ranch is stocked with cattle, horses, and poultry, and we have some fine fruit trees. Not much of a ranch, you'll say, when one thinks in terms of thousands of acres of land and thousands of heads of cattle. But we call it our ranch just the same, and we're making a fine go of it. Would like to hear from folks interested in the West.

ALEXANDER BORN.

General Delivery, South Tacoma, Washington.

Young ranch girl.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have lived on a ranch all my life, and I always want to live in the West. Our ranch isn't very large, for it only covers two square miles of land, but it is a lovely spot just the same. I have my own saddle horse—a little black—and this summer I'm to have a gray pony.

I have a brother who is a real cowboy. Father has about fifty horses, a small bunch of cattle, and a few sheep. We do quite a bit of farming, too. I'll be pleased to write to all the sixteen-year-old girls of the Gang.

JUNE WARE.

Upton, Wyoming.

"A lonely English soldier on the frontier of India would like to correspond with hombres about his own age, which is twenty-one," says Trooper W. L. Bailey, 1st Troop, "C" Squadron, 4th—7th Dragoon Guards, Sialkot, Punjab, India. Don't overlook our faraway Gangsters, folks.

"I will be very glad to exchange snaps and views and also to give plenty of information about India and China," says Private A. E. Barrett, "C" Company, 1st Loyal Regiment, Trimulgherry, Deccan, India. Fill up this Gangster's empty mail box, folks.

"I'd like Pen Pals from Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Salvador, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Trinidad, and from each and every South American country in particular," says J. B. Saunders 614 East Franklin Avenue, Gastonia, North Carolina.

"Your old fifteen-country wanderer is back again after an absence of three years," says J. W. B. Atkinson, 706 Grand Street, Pullman, Washington. This wandering Gangster has finally settled in Pullman, where he aims to stay for many a year.

"My husband and I would like to start a dairy farm in some town where there is a possibility of making good at the undertaking," says Mrs. I. M. Reynolds, Box 418, Omak, Washington. Gangsters who have suggestions to offer are urged to come forward, as well as sister Gangsters living in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon.

THE WILD-DOG MENACE

FARM land on the edge of the wilderness is often subject to the depredations of wild beasts, and farmers in the Adirondack region of New York State have suffered by the incursions of wild deer and other animals into their field. Devastation has lately been wrought by bands of half wild dogs.

Within the last year, the county of St. Lawrence paid more than twelve thousand dollars to sheep owners whose flocks had been depleted by these sheep-killing raiders. The menace is serious enough, it is said, to threaten the continuance of the sheep-raising industry in the Adirondacks, should these raids keep up.

The dogs have not limited their attacks to sheep. Recently, a pack of these dogs invaded the poultry yard of Charles A. Annis, near Lake Placid, destroying one hundred hens. Deer, also, are subject to their attacks.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

by *John North*

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE first letter I opened this week was from a homeseeker, which goes to prove that the Western pioneer is still with us. "I've been reading your very interesting department for some time and want to trouble you for a little information," writes M. M. P., of Baltimore, Maryland. "For the last two years I have been in bad health and I believe that if I could get out in the open in the West for a while I would feel like a different man. However, I have a family to take into consideration and can't do anything rash. I have been advised that the town of Rathdrum out in Kootenai County, Idaho, offers opportunities to the homeseeker. What can you tell me about this place, Mr North?"

From all that I have heard, Rathdrum is a mighty fine and pleasant town, possessed of great natural scenic beauty. It is located at the foot of Mount Rathdrum and traversed by a little creek of clear water which flows down through the city park, where it furnishes pure, clean, moving water for the community swimming pool.

Rathdrum has about everything necessary to make it a desirable place to live in. Its climate is good and its water pure. There are a public library, public park, community house, splendid schools, electric lights and power, a bank, a grain elevator, and a full complement of garages and mercantile houses, ready to supply your every need. The mountain benches to the west and north of Rathdrum are dotted with houses, while south and east of the town lies Rathdrum Prairie, five to fifteen miles wide, with vast areas of cultivated fields and bountiful, growing crops.

Speaking of crops and such things, Dick L., of Watertown, Massachusetts, is making some inquiries along this line. "Folks tell me some mighty interesting tales about the Imperial Val-

ley of California, Mr. North. Just where is this section located and what is grown out there? I'm interested in a region that is fertile as I've been a farmer all my life, and at the same time I'd like a mild climate, as I'm not as young as I once was."

"Well, folks might be excused for waxing a little bit enthusiastic about the Imperial Valley, for it's mighty fascinating country. Twenty years ago this region was known as the Colorado Desert, and was an unwatered and uninhabited tract. Water diverted from the Colorado River has transformed it to-day into one of the most productive agricultural areas in the world. It is a beautiful stretch of country, too, lying beneath the bright sun and blue skies of southern California, bounded on three sides by the high domes and granite-ribbed hills of the inner Coast Range, and on the fourth side by the largest river of the Southwest.

This region is a sort of miracle valley of the desert, with its wide fields of cotton, its thousands of acres of cantaloupes, and its great reaches of knee-deep alfalfa. Here, too, grow date palms, lemons, and grapefruits. About six hundred thousand acres in the valley are under cultivation, and over two hundred and fifty thousand more are irrigable. In the Imperial Valley, Dick will find a deep, fertile silt, which, with the warm sunshine, makes it possible to grow almost any crop with the best results.

And results are what all of us are looking for, whether our quest be for a place to grow crops or a place to spend the most profitable vacation. Walter F., of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is planning a motor trip out to the famous Black Hills soon and is flinging some questions at us about that section of the world. "Tell me what you can about the Custer State Park of South Dakota, Mr. North," says he. "What's the scenery like? What about camping privileges? I'd like to know also if, in case I like the place so well that I want to go back every year, it would be possible to lease a cabin site? And, if so, who would be the person to talk to about this?"

Walter certainly won't be disappointed in the scenery, for without doubt the most fascinating and imposing scenery east of the Rockies is found in the South Dakota State Park. Standing sentinel is Harney Peak, while down its sides are the renowned "Needles" or "Cathedral Spires," and at its base nestles beautiful Sylvan Lake. The State game department has an ownership of several hundred acres of land along the eastern boundary of the Park and is caring for it and improving the game preserve features. The State Lodge is located therein.

Camping privileges are granted to tourists near the Lodge and at Sylvan Lake, as well as throughout the Park in convenient inviting places. The only strict and rigid rules to be observed are relative to the care of camp fires and their extinguishment before campers leave them. Nor will Walter have any difficulty in obtaining a cabin site, should he want to return annually for his vacation. There are innumerable attractive spots all through the Park, along the streams, that are surveyed, or may be, in small tracts which will be leased at ten dollars a year for a term of years under restrictive rules to those who desire to build summer homes. For information about this Walter should confer or correspond with the secretary of the State Park board.

We Westerners are pretty keen seekers after information, and some of the hombres who read this magazine are mighty obliging about handing out facts. For instance, here is a letter which I received the other day, and

which I think many of you will find interesting.

"As an old and close reader of your magazine I noticed in a recent issue a letter from J. M. S., of Dayton, Ohio, asking about land in western Canada," writes C. E. K., of Willingden, Alberta. "Perhaps your readers would like a letter from a party on the ground, Mr. North. I was born in Canada and raised on a large farm in Manitoba. In fact, I have spent all my life west of the Great Lakes, some of it in the Western States. For several years now I have been with the Canadian Pacific Railroad as a construction engineer.

"This summer we built a new branch from the Saskatchewan-Alberta boundary northwest sixty-six miles to Willingden. A survey party is now working here to Edmonton, fifty-six miles away. We finished laying steel on December, 20, 1927. Since then we have had two trains day and night hauling wheat, but at that we simply can't handle it. Many fields yielded over fifty bushels of wheat per acre. Gangs are rushing up elevators. There are four of five sidings under construction now.

Not a tenth of the land up here is under cultivation. There are no homesteads, but good prairie land can be bought from eighteen to twenty-five dollars per acre. Small game is plentiful and big game is easy to reach. There is plenty of fish. The Saskatchewan River is eighteen miles away. We have good water and fuel. Should any of the readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE care to write me direct, I will gladly give them more details. I can also send them a three-foot government wall map of northern Alberta showing railroads, auto roads, and water courses."

All letters addressed to C. E. K. will be promptly forwarded.

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, published weekly, at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1928.

State of New York, County of New York (*ss.*)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Ormond G. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is President of the Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers,* Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor,* Frank E. Blackwell, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors,* Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers,* Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Annie K. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

ORMOND G. SMITH, President,
Of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23rd day of March, 1928. De Witt C. Van Valkenburgh, Notary Public No. 184, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1928.)

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

LEWIS, MRS. ZOIE, nee **BEAUMONT.**—Lived for several years in Des Moines, Iowa. Last heard from in Winnipeg, Canada. Information appreciated by Lucille, care of this magazine.

McCOY, METTIE.—Thirty-five years old. Auburn hair, blue eyes and a small scar on right side of face near corner of mouth. Last heard from in June, 1926, in Vernon, Texas. Information appreciated by L. M. R., 1203 Beardsley Street, Akron, Ohio.

KISSINGER, MARVIN.—About thirty-five years old. Six feet two inches tall, black hair and brown eyes. Information appreciated by L. M. R., 1203 Beardsley Street, Akron, Ohio.

BRADY, ALFRED.—Left Marion, Ohio, for Rugby, North Dakota. Father and mother anxious. Please write or come home. Mrs. Louise Shrall, 140 North Main Street, Marion, Ohio.

BAKER, WILLARD LEON.—Born in Quincy, Ohio, fifteen years ago. Black hair, brown eyes and dark complexion. Has a scar on upper lip. Disappeared in August, 1925, while visiting relatives in Van Tassell, Wyoming. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Ray E. Baker, Box 14, Van Tassell, Wyoming.

WILLIAMS, WALTER GEORGE.—Forty years old. A painter. Last heard from in August, 1927, in Moore, Montana. Sad news about mother. Home folks longing to hear from him. Please write to J. F. Williams, Baldwin, Georgia.

TERREL, DICK.—Was a salesman for "Clipse," in August, 1926. Boarded at the Swartz home in Soo, Michigan. Please write to Mrs. Mabel Anderson Audary, Box 11, Raco, Michigan.

ADA D.—Everything is O. K. I am living with your brother George. Please write to Dad, 13 Duplex Avenue, North Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

WHAPLES, ORPHA.—Born in Little Falls, Minnesota, thirty-three years ago. Last heard from in Greely, Colorado, in 1908. Please write to your sister, Merlon, care of this magazine.

COURSEY, E. W.—Last heard from in Matamoris, Mexico. Has E. W. C. tattooed on arm. Louise married. Mamma is moving to Tampa. Please write to G. W. M., 1615 Thirteenth Street, Tampa, Florida.

DONLEY, ROBERT MELVIE.—Belonged to the fire department in Mobile, Alabama, in 1919, and was a private in Company F, One Hundred and Twenty-third Infantry, at Camp Wheeler, Macon, Georgia, in 1922.

HILL, ARTHUR.—Last heard from in Catt, Ontario, Canada, thirty-nine years ago. Left Canada to work on a railroad in the North. Information appreciated by his sister-in-law, Mrs. Thomas Hill, 627 East Eleventh Street, Erie, Pennsylvania.

FLEMING or **BLITZ.**—Born in Toledo, Ohio, in 1905. As his mother was not able to care for him at this time, he was taken from her when two days old by a Mr. Peter Blitz. Information appreciated by his mother, who has married again. Mrs. Berth Fleming Clark, 1026 Erie Street, Toledo, Ohio.

WEBB, HARRY S.—This separation and silence is terrible. I still feel as I did a year ago. Please send me at T a post card with your address but no message on it. M. H.

DADDY.—Important news. Please write to Beecie, care of this magazine.

SMITH, MINA, and daughter.—Left home eight years ago. Husband is dead and son is alone. Information appreciated by her mother, Mrs. Nettie L. Riley, R. F. D. Osakis, Minnesota.

JOHNSON, BILL.—Please write to your old pal, Philip, care N. O. Cotton Exchange, New Orleans, Louisiana.

SCHULTZ, GEORGE.—Please write to your old pal, Philip, care N. O. Cotton Exchange, New Orleans, Louisiana.

CONNER, CAPTAIN.—Stationed at New Orleans in 1918-'20. If you remember your little friend please send address to H. E., care of this magazine.

STEWART ALFRED.—Traveled with the Wade and Howard Shows, in 1926-27. Last heard from at the Meigs County Fair. Forgive me and write to Marie Taylor, care of this magazine.

JONES, MRS. KATIE.—Your daughter, who was placed in the St. Clara's Convent when she was five years old and is now thirty years old, is anxious to hear from you or any of your relatives. Hattie Jones, care of this magazine.

AYALA, MRS. JAKE, nee **KITTY TEAGUE.**—Born in El Borado, California. Moved to San Francisco twenty-three years ago. Information appreciated by her brother, Ed. Teague, Tipton, California.

OWENS, MR.—Worked on the steel construction of the Johnston Building, in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1928. Please send your address to H. E., care of this magazine.

ZIEDLER, DOCTOR KREMIN.—Was a dentist in New Orleans, in 1918-'19. Please write to E. M., care of this magazine.

SHORT, WILLIAM BEARL.—Last heard from in December, 1926, on board the U. S. S. "Canopus," San Diego, California. Please write to Herbert Short, Route 4, Birmingham, Alabama.

KEATING, JAMES A.—About twenty-five years old. Last heard from in Ohio. Information appreciated by J. A. Keating, Golden's Bridge, New York.

RASMUSSON, GILBERT.—At one time a porter in a Chicago saloon. Your sister Mary's daughter, Gertrude, who was adopted when a baby, is anxious to hear from you. Please write to Gertrude, care of this magazine.

ALDRIDGE, VERNON.—Have news for you. Please write to your B. O. Palm, care of this magazine.

BRISTOW, W. L.—Last heard from in Perris, California, four years ago. Had a daughter, named Edith, nineteen years old. Information concerning them appreciated by Mrs. Mary Trussell, Stecker, Oklahoma.

HOOPER, S. E.—About fifty years old. Last heard from in Russellville, Alabama, in 1919. Information appreciated by his daughter, Juanita Hooper, Stecker, Oklahoma.

ROIDER, A.—Remember the return trip on the Red Star liner, "Bulgaria?" Have lost your address. Please write to W. M., care of this magazine.

COX, BUCKNER.—Last heard from in Washington, D. C., in October, 1927. Have wonderful news for you. Please write to Travis Benton, 312 Baxter Building, Harlingen, Texas.

JOHNSTONE, JOSEPH J.—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, when he was employed as a Chevrolet salesman at 2612 Michigan Boulevard. Information appreciated by Teddy Iden, 157 West Adams Street, Rochester, Pennsylvania.

ODOM, BOB.—Why don't you write as you promised? Lottie, care of this magazine.

HASTINGS, LAURA and **TOM.**—Would like to hear from their children. Lived near Baldwin, Arkansas. Last heard from ten years ago. Please write to Mrs. Pearl Williams, Henryetta, Oklahoma.

SHARP, ROBERT.—Last heard from when he was in the navy. Believed to be in Cuba. Please write to an old schoolmate of Mingo High School in Nelumka. Lottie Marie Williams, Henryetta, Oklahoma.

ALLEN, WILLIAM.—About forty-five years old. Wife's name before marriage was C. Conley. Lived in Philadelphia with wife and children. Information appreciated by his daughter, Loretta, care of this magazine.

HAWAIIAN BOY.—Gave a performance, "A Trip to the Hawaiian Islands," at the Palace Theater, Sabine, Ohio, on February 24, 1928. Please write to Helen Lee, Route 2, Washington C. H., Ohio.

NEW ORLEANS, HAMILTON, RICHARD, WARREN and **JOHN.**—Grandmother's name was Batette. Please write to your three Northern cousins, A. B. C., care of this magazine.

YOUNG, CHRISTINA.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California. Please write to B. W. Gale, 273 North Monroe Street, Arlington, Riverside County, California.

HUHN or **EWEN, WILLIAM.**—Sixty years old. Taken when young from an orphan's home in New York by a Mr. John Hennessy, Harper's Ferry, Allermerkee County, Iowa. Has sisters. Information appreciated by Mrs. G. Manners, 78 Laird Avenue, Avon, New Jersey.

MARTIN, HENRY.—Seventy years old. Lived in North Manchester, Indiana. Last heard from in Vincennes, Indiana. Please write to your son, James Martin, 1808 Race Street, Cente, Ohio.

ST. HILAIRE, ROBERT.—Last heard from in Stockton, California. Information appreciated by his nephew, Charles St. Hilaire, 750 Wordin Avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any of the boys who served in the Eleventh Company, C. A. C., Fort Mills, Corregidor Island, from May, 1920, to May, 1922. Maurice J. Fenner, Box 56, Topinabee, Michigan.

AYRTON, JOSEPHINE.—Last heard from in 1923, when she was living at 113 Clinton Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. Please write to the sailor friend you met in the Willis Theater in New York City. Bob, care of this magazine.

TAYLOR, JACK.—About forty years old. Last heard from in Red Lodge, Montana. Please write to your friend, J., 930 Rose Road, Miami, Arizona.

MUNN, JOHN W.—Left Blanchard, Michigan, in 1889. Last heard from in 1900, when he was in Arkansas. Believed to be in the West or Southwest. Information appreciated by his brother, Clyde Munn, 6810 Twenty-fourth Avenue, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

COLLINS, IRIN, BERTHA, LOTTIE and **HERBERT.**—Your niece, the daughter of the late Frank Collins, is anxious to hear from you. Please write to Hester Louise Collins, 64 Livermore Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

SEMMER or **LEMMER.**—Was foreman in St. Paul for a large New York sheet-metal firm. Have good news for you. Please write to A. R. Wasser, Y. M. C. A. Hotel, Wabash Avenue, near Eighth Street, Chicago, Illinois.

HASSETT, FRANK.—Important. Let us know by wire immediately where you are. Your pal, Sherman, care of this magazine.

OLNEY, TRAVERS F. and **MYRON H.**—Travers was last heard from in 1920, when he was working in a lumber camp near Vancouver, British Columbia. Myron was last heard from fifteen years ago in Waterville, Washington. Information appreciated by their sister, Floribel, now Mrs. W. H. Brown, 5462 Bennet Street, Rockford, Illinois.

SPENCE, EDNA.—My sister, who is now nine years old, was taken from 58 Massey Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, by a lady when she was seven months old. Will the one who took her away please write to Edna's sister, Dolly, care of this magazine.

METZ, NELSON, NICK BONENKA, RUSSELL GIBSON.—Who served with M. H. U. 100 at Oswego, New York, please write to Park Elswick, Box 34, Lookout, Kentucky.

LILLIAN, Major JORDON, or **PAWNEE BILL.**—Please send your address to Jack, care of this magazine.

WARD, GEORGE W.—We need you. Everything is all right. Please write at once to Daisy Ward, General Delivery, Beaumont, Texas.

AUDREY and **BONNIE.**—Mother has settled everything, all charges dropped. Fred L. C., care of this magazine.

EBELING, CHARLES L.—Why did you leave me? I shall always love you. Please write to M., 73 Harrison Street, Delaware, Ohio.

LIEB, LOUIS.—Thirty-eight years old. A blond, five feet seven inches tall, and has a scar on bottom of lip. Last heard from in December, 1914. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Lieb, 53 Auburn Street, Boston, Massachusetts.

BONHAM, WALTER G.—About fifty years old. Last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1920. Information appreciated by Burley H. Ballard, Black Oak, Arkansas.

TOLONEN, WILLIAM F.—About twenty-three years old. Left home in the fall of 1918. Last heard from in Billings, Montana. Please write to your sister, Helen Tolonen, Route 1, Box 52, Chisholm, Minnesota.

KNIGHT, JOHN and **JESSE.**—Last heard from when discharged from the army. Your father is still living. Please come home or write to your sister, Frances Thornhill, Route 5, Box 49, Alba, Texas.

COURDIN, JOHN M.—Served on the U. S. S. "New York," in Panama City, in March, 1923. Was discharged from the navy on November 10, 1927. My letters to Seattle, Washington, returned. We love you and want you to come home. Please write to your mother, care of this magazine.

THOMAS, BUNNY.—Please write to your heartbroken and worried hubby, V. L. T., care of this magazine.

ROSCOE, WADDELL.—Twenty-three years old. Last heard from in Montgomery, Alabama, in September, 1927. Information appreciated by his father T. G. Waddell, Route 3, Vinemont, Alabama.

DOCKSTEADER, JESSE.—About forty-five years old. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by his anxious mother, Mrs. Nellie Docksteader, Alma, Michigan.

BABE W.—My answer to your last letter returned. Please write again and give permanent address, as it takes three months for answers. V. M. S., care of this magazine.

WHITE, VIOLET.—Last heard from in August, 1916, at Marshfield, Oregon. Information appreciated by Winnie Elliott, Route 1, Zeandale, Kansas.

OSBORNE, CLARICE.—Formerly of Nebraska. Please write to Colleen Lydon, care of this magazine.

MITCHELL, FRED.—Please write and let me know where you are. Vincent Womer, Box 35, Eldred, Pennsylvania.

WADAMS, D. M., or wife, **EMMA.**—Last heard from in High River, Alberta, Canada, about nine years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Alice, care of this magazine.

TOMMERVIK, OLE HANSON.—Please write to your sister, Hanna Moen, Box 102, Laguna Beach, California.

MASUCCI, MRS. TILLEWINE, nee **ANN GRANT.**—Believed to be in the State of Washington. Do you remember the girl you were bridesmaid for in Paterson? Please write to Pinkie, care of this magazine.

SEXTON, FRANK or **FRED.**—Sixty years old. Last heard from in Meridian, Idaho, in 1910. Followed sheep shearing. Sad news about Gladys. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Blanche S. McAlister, Route 1, Box 100, Murphy, Oregon.

KAISER, EDDIE.—If you remember Sophie Wagner of Urbana, please come and see her, as she is paralyzed. Her address is 1740 Winnemac Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

NOTICE.—Will the tall blond young man who got on a Great Northern passenger train, either at Kalispill or Columbia Falls, Montana, on February 23, 1928, and who got off at Shelby to catch the three o'clock train for Great Falls, please write to the girl he waved at? Address, B, care of this magazine.

HARRIS, AUDREY CLUGSTON, and daughter **HELEN.**—Sad news about your uncle. Please write to Mrs. C. E. Esselburn, 103 East Eighth Street, Ashland, Ohio.

OLSON, CARL.—Formerly of Rochester, Minnesota. Last heard from in Oil Center, California. Please write to your sister, L. Olson, 712 West Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

SHEPHERD, JOHN E.—Fingers on right hand off except thumb and half of little finger. Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois. Information appreciated by Bert McGuire, 308 Ann Street, Peoria, Illinois.

SCHMIDT, MIKE.—Letter for you held at this office. Please come home. Eddie is always crying for you and I forgive you. Rosie, care of this magazine.

ROGERS, GEORGE GRAY.—Twenty-nine years old. Six feet tall, blue eyes and brown hair. Believed to be traveling. Everything is straight again. Your children cry for you. We are sad and cannot live without you. Please write to your wife, Mrs. George Gray Rogers, Manning, Arkansas.

McKINNEY, LAWRENCE.—About fifty-seven years old. Has brothers, Tom and George. Sister Julia passed away. Last heard from him in Tostno, Montana, in 1916. He worked for C. H. Canon, Box 43, Hendrum, Minnesota, in 1915. Important news awaits him. Please write to Thomas McKinney, North Troy, Vermont.

SCHOEN, LULU MAY CLARK.—Your two little boys and mother want you to come home. Please write to Mrs. J. D. Clark, 1030 North Henry Street, Lebanon, Indiana.

MURPHY, JAMES F.—Left home September 26, 1927. Information appreciated by his wife and baby, who need him. Mrs. James F. Murphy, 420 Scott Street, Springfield, Ohio.

LINK, ROY.—Do you remember John and Mary Werle, whom you met in Canada, in 1920? Please write to Mary Werle, A 3816 Eastern Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

MARIELS, HUBERT.—Twenty-nine years old. Tattooed on arm with the word mother. Over six feet tall. Served on the U. S. S. "Brooklyn" during the World War. Information appreciated by his brother, Jesse Mariels, 502 Montgomery Street, Portland, Oregon.

WILSON, MRS.—Last heard from in St. Paul's Sanitarium, Dallas, Texas, in August, 1903. Information appreciated by some one dear to her. J. J., care of this magazine.

VICTOR.—Last heard from in Cumberland. Please forgive me. Am sorry I took letters. Will go on contract with you at once. Send for me. I need you. Jane, Box 30, Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania.

TRUNNELL, MRS. JOSIAH, nee **CATHERINE WILSON.**—Am anxious to locate the Wilson descendants. Forefathers were Scotch. Believed to have settled in Maryland or Virginia, in 1741. Have important information for them. Please write to W. H. T., care of this magazine.

HENDERSON, ALBERT.—Twenty years old. Last heard from in Megargie, Texas, in December, 1926. Information appreciated by Bessie Winchester, 902 West Day Street, Denison, Texas.

LONG, HARVEY VINTEN.—Fifteen years old. Born in Ellinwood, Kansas. Right eye is artificial. Last heard from in San Francisco, in 1926. Information appreciated by his Sister Bessie, now Mrs. W. B. Sinney, General Delivery, Herman, Nebraska.

HARTLEY, HARRY.—Last heard from in Nampa, Idaho, in February, 1926. Believed to be in North Yakima, Washington, working for the government. Has a sister who lives near Iola, Kansas. Information appreciated by L. N. Pollock, 1512 Sixth Street, Nampa, Idaho.

LEWIS, MRS., nee **ANDERSON.**—My mother. Anxious to locate any of my relatives. Parents were born in Charlotte, North Carolina. Information appreciated by Emily Lewis, care of this magazine.

AXLROD, LOUIS or **BLACKIE.**—Missing since 1913. Formerly of Cleveland, Ohio. Last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri. Information appreciated by his brother, L. Axlrod, 4520 Ninth Street, N. W. Washington, D. C.

WALLACE, HAREL.—Formerly of Marietta, Georgia. Last heard from in Henrietta, Texas, where he was employed as a lineman. The gang is anxious to hear from you. Cliff Connor, 616 Cherokee Street, Marietta, Georgia.

NOTICE.—Am anxious to locate a soldier who was at one time stationed in Montgomery, Alabama. He was born in Norway and brought up in New York City by a married brother. Please write to Evelyn Akins, 2930 Westmont Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

LAPER, CHESTER.—Last heard from in Ortonville, Minnesota. Please write to Doris I. Miller, care of C. A. Curtis' Ranch, Donald, Washington.

BOZARTH or **BARTELL, MRS. BILLIE.**—Have news for you. Please write at once to C. J. N., care of this magazine.

CARWIN, CHARLIE, and **ALEX C. ALEXANDER.**—The latter was last heard from in Cowden, West Virginia, in the spring of 1917, while working for the R. & S. Company. Information concerning either of them appreciated by L. A. N. A., care of this magazine.

GORDEN, OSCAR.—Has a brother named Clyde. I need you. Please write to M., care of this magazine.

MURPHY, BILL.—Please write to Irene Leach, 8425 Baltimore Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

BINGLEY, PHILIP.—Thirty-eight years old. Last heard from when he enlisted in the cavalry at Columbus Barracks, in 1912. Information appreciated by James L. Bingley, Florence Street, Whalem Park, Fitchburg, Massachusetts.

BINGLEY, CARL.—Thirty-four years old. Last heard from when he was an orderly at Summer Street Hospital, Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1912. Information appreciated by James L. Bingley, Florence Street, Whalem Park, Fitchburg, Massachusetts.

SMITH, BALDY.—Your son is looking for you. Please write to F. H. S., care of this magazine.

TOM.—Am going East next year. Would you care to see me then? I haven't forgotten you and never will. Please send answer to E. A. S., care of this magazine.

KEMBERLIN, MRS. GRACE BONNIE, nee **ROSS.**—Formerly of Huntington, Pennsylvania, Charity Hospital, Norristown, Pennsylvania, and latterly of Black Fan Apartments, Norristown, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by J. A. S., care of this magazine.

J. I.—Why don't you write to Ed of Saratoga, care of Klein, 86 Cherry Street, Albany, New York.

YATES, ROBERT E.—About fifty-five years old. Last heard from in St. Louis, Missouri. Believed to be in California. Please write to Mrs. Myrtle Smith, care of "Billboard," Cincinnati, Ohio.

CARVER, JAMES PEMBROKE.—Last heard from ten years ago at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, when he was with E Company, Fifteenth Infantry. Please write to Mrs. Myrtle Smith, care of "Billboard," Cincinnati, Ohio.

SPRIGGS, ERNIE.—You are forgiven. Please write to your heartbroken mother. Plan to come home before April 9, 1929, or you will be too late. Please write immediately to Robina A. Spriggs, 1325 South Elm Street, Alhambra, California.

BOB.—Received your letter. Address of R. L. M., Sr., is Brooklyn, Connecticut. Please write to Stuart, care of this magazine.

GODDARD, E. B., CHRISTIAN H. BERNS, BOBBY BURROWS and **STUART E. WRIGHT.**—The latter is from Washington, D. C. Anxious to hear from all of you. Stuart C. Wright, Headquarters, Second C. A. District, Fort Totten, New York.

EDWARDS, ARTHUR K.—Eighteen years old. Last heard from in Winters, Texas, in January, 1978. Parents anxious. Information appreciated by Arthur Edwards, 894 Eighth Street, San Bernardino, California.

LA MONT, MADELINE.—Of Chicago. Do you remember the one who took you riding in the Buick sedan when you worked at the Wilson tea room? Am in the marine corps and many miles from home. Would like to hear from you. Jimmie T., care of this magazine.

ABBOTT, CHARLES.—A blond, over six feet tall. Mother worried. Please write to your niece, who is anxious to hear from you, Mrs. F. G. B., care of this magazine.

MURRAY, WILLIAM.—A native of Kings County, Ireland. Came to America in 1886. Had brothers, Tom and Jack, and a sister, Ellen. Information appreciated by his sister-in-law, Essie Teeling, care of this magazine.

LOUGHRAN, ALEX.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, three years ago. Please write to your sister, Alice, care of this magazine.

HAYES, ROBERT.—Last heard from in Lander, Wyoming. Please write to Alexander Riddet, Box 206, Hazardville, Connecticut.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any members of the Machine Gun Company, Forty-third Infantry, who served at Camp Logan, Texas, during 1917-'19. Doc, care of this magazine.

MOON, ROLAND.—Served in the regular army of Machine Gun Company, Forty-third Infantry. Home was in Oklahoma. Please write to Doc, care of this magazine.

McGAR, CURTIS and **WINNIE.**—Formerly of Slaton, Texas. Last heard from they were moving to California. Information appreciated by Vyola Weare, 140 Soledad Street, Salinas, California.

HULL, LAURENCE RICHARD, or **L. R. EVANS.**—Twenty years old. Was put in a home when ten years old. Lived with a farmer named Joel De Geer of Clare and Sheridan, Michigan, in 1924, also lived with John Bitler, Mr. Jessie and Mr. Stevens, a garage man of Clare, Michigan. Last heard from in August, 1925. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Susan A. Evans, 1036 Cherry Street, Detroit, Michigan.

PERRIN or **SWARTZMILLER, EMIL.**—Last heard from in Canning, South Dakota, in 1902. Your sister, who was twelve years old at that time, is anxious to hear from you. Please write to Lizzy Gnadt, care of Mrs. Louise Pigars, R. F. D. 1, Box 599, Everett, Washington.

LORENZ, MAX, or **MAC LAWRENCE.**—Your father died last year. Your mother is staying with L. and J. She is worried about you. Please write to Erna, care of this magazine.

COY, BOB.—Your mother has been ill. Have news for you. Please write to Peggy, Route 1, Box 120, Vancouver, Washington.

BAILEFF, ROBERT.—Fifty-five years old. Left Barrow, Furness, England, about thirty-five years ago. A plumber. Information appreciated by John D. Baileff, 507 Sanderson Avenue, Olyphant, Pennsylvania.

LEWIS, MRS. BERTHA.—Formerly of Oriskany Falls, New York. Believed to be in Utica, New York, or Terra Haute, Indiana. Information appreciated by G., care of this magazine.

HAZARD, MILDRED.—Mother's name was Anna Thompson. Lived at one time in Victoria, B. C. Believed to be living in Minnesota with a son-in-law. Has married three times. Information appreciated by J. K., care of this magazine.

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